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**HISTORICAL SKETCH**  
**First Congregational Church**  
**STURBRIDGE : MASSACHUSETTS**

By George H. Haynes









*Photograph by Charles W. Elden*

THE NEW CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
Dedicated, May 11, 1910.

**Historical Sketch**  
OF THE  
**First Congregational Church**  
STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

By **GEORGE H. HAYNES**

Read at the Dedication of the New Church  
May 11, 1910

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## Historical Sketch of the First Congregational Church in Sturbridge, Massachusetts

By GEORGE H. HAYNES

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Read at the Dedication of the New Church, May 11, 1910

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The settling of an orthodox minister and the promoting of a land-development scheme!—To-day, no combination of activities could seem much more incongruous. And yet, in the record of a land grant by our Massachusetts General Court is found the first point in the history of this Church of Christ. For it is to be observed that land developing two hundred years ago in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay was done with other methods and other objects than those commonly attributed to companies of shrewd men who secure grants of the public domain yet remaining undeveloped, it may be in Montana or in Alaska.

Three times a group of Medfield men petitioned the General Court for a grant of land in this frontier wilderness. Twice their prayer was rejected. The representatives at Boston apparently doubted the ability of this inhospitable region to support a settlement. But the promoters were importunate. In their third petition—that of September, 1729—they say: “your petitioners Humbly begg Leave To Inform this Hon<sup>ble</sup> Court That Although there Is Indeed much poor Land Contained Therein, yett There is Also A Considerable quantity of Good Land fitt for Settlements And in our Humble Opinion a sufficiency To Enable your petitioners by the Blessing of God, in Concurrence with Diligence And

Industry, to Support the ordinary Charges of a Township." In granting this petition, the General Court made it one of the essential conditions "that the Proprietors shall Settle an Orthodox Minister And Lay out to him an Home Lott . . . which Lott Shall Draw the fiftyeth Part of the Province Land [10,000 acres] Now granted."

Though allowed seven years in which to comply with the conditions, the Proprietors gave prompt attention to the obligations thus imposed upon them. At their second meeting (July 9, 1730) they accepted a committee's recommendation that the meeting-house should "Stand upon sutable Land att or Near the Meeting of the Roads on the Land w<sup>ch</sup> was Gov<sup>r</sup> Saltonstalls farm on the West side of Sugar Brook." Their negotiations with the Saltonstall heirs were successful, so that a year later they were ready to vote: "That the propriety will build a Meeting House as soon as Conveintly they Can"; "That the Meeting House Shall be fifty foot in Length & fourty foot in Width And Two & Twenty foot Between the sells & plates"; and to determine that the building should be enclosed within a year and finished within two years. To this object they devoted £540,—nearly all of that sum being the total proceeds of "the Seven Supernumerous Lotts" not laid out to the original petitioners for the land grant. Having by formal vote determined to "promote preaching att New Medfield so Caled," the Proprietors devolved upon their "Annual Committee" the duty "to take Care of & provide for preaching att New Medfield by procuring a Minister or Ministers and Taking Care for his Entertainment," and a charge of 15 shillings was levied upon each original Proprietor, "the Minister's Lott Exempted." Six months later the Committee reported that they had paid Mr. Cowell (apparently the first preacher of the Gospel in this place) "£28 and Eight pound for his Boarding," and thereupon it was decided to raise a levy of 40 shillings upon each Proprietor's right, to "promote preaching att New Medfield for the year Insuing."



All these proceedings, it is to be noticed, took place at *Medfield*, separated by fifty or sixty miles of hard travel from the community which they concerned. In the autumn of 1735 the Proprietors discussed whether they should "Act any thing Referring to the Calling of & settling of a Minister," but decided that they would "waite upon the Inhabitants three Months Longer from this Date." The meeting was then adjourned to the eleventh of the following February, when the Proprietors were to assemble at the meeting-house in New Medfield at nine o'clock in the morning. In order to attend this meeting, probably not a few of the Proprietors made their first laborious journey, in midwinter, to this frontier hamlet; then for the first time they saw the lands which had been allotted them, and the meeting-house for which they had been assessed. That building stood about ten rods south of the place where you are now sitting, approximately on the site of the District No. 1 school house. It need cause no surprise that the record of that first gathering of the Proprietors within that sacred edifice reads: "Uoted to adjourn the Meeting on hour and then To Meete att the House of M<sup>r</sup> Stacy." A meeting-house without fireplace might be suitable for two or three long religious services on a February Sunday, but for a business conference on a weekday the Proprietors sought a more temperate climate. Gathered around a roaring fireplace in a private house, they promptly gave their official approval to "the Uote of the Inhabitants of the Town of New Medfield That the first wednesday of March next be set Apart for prayer & fasting to seek Direction for the making Choice of a Gospell Minister, to settle in s<sup>d</sup> New Medfield," and voted that the pastors of churches in Medfield (the mother town), Brookfield, Oxford and Dudley be taken into council in "the affaire Referring To the Making Choise of an orthodox Minister."

When the Proprietors next met, two months later, in Medfield, it was reported that the deliberations of the settlers here had resulted in a unanimous vote in favor of calling Mr.

Caleb Rice. The Proprietors accordingly approved and confirmed "the joynt Agreement of our Children & others Dwelling upon our Lands att a place Called New Medfield in Calling M<sup>r</sup> Caleb Rice to settle . . in the work of the Ministry," and voted to grant and settle upon him, his heirs and assigns, "the severall Allottments & Right Laid out & Reserved for a Minister in s<sup>d</sup> New Medfield," and to pay him £200 "in bills of Creedett for settlement & Incouragement . . . Upon Condition he settle & Continue During his Naturall Life in s<sup>d</sup> New Medfield an orthodox Minister According to the perfect faith of the Churches in this Country as by our province Law are Establisht." For the first three years his annual salary was to be £110 and thereafter £120. Mr. Rice's reply was that he considered the offer and proposals "in the Generall To be handsom & generous." He demurred, however, at the agreement's being made conditional upon his settling and continuing "During Naturall Life" in the town, and the Proprietors consented to the omission of the phrase. The financial proposition he was ready to accept, but adds: "Yet not being so thoroughly Acquainted with the Charges & Expenses of Living, if in process of time my Circumstances should Require & Call for More [he was but twenty-four years old and recently married!] I should Depend & Rely upon it that as I Give my selfe to the work of the Ministry; so I should Receive a decent & hansom support." He requested in addition to what had been offered "such a quantity of fire wood Annually as shall be thought a Necessary & Conveinant Supply." This request seemed reasonable to the Proprietors, and on these terms the contract was closed.\*

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\*The Rev. Joseph S. Clark,—whose *Historical Sketch* has left all lovers of Sturbridge his debtors, and whose son, the Rev. Joseph B. Clark, D. D., a native of this town, has just rendered a doubly filial service in preaching the sermon at the dedication of this Church,—estimated that the financial proposition thus made to the first settled minister in this town, reduced from bills of credit of 1736 to the money of 1836 meant this: a settlement of \$160; a salary of \$96; 50 cords of firewood annually, and a farm of about 500 acres. In considering these money payments, it should be borne in mind that at that time corn cost but ninepence a bushel, and fourteen cents was a day's wage. The land which fell to Mr. Rice was widely distributed. The writer is indebted

The Proprietors ratified these financial arrangements and the further action of "our Children & others being Inhabitants Dwelling in New Medfield so Called" in fixing upon the twenty-ninth of September, 1736, to be "set apart as a Day for Imbodying a Church in s<sup>d</sup> place." On that day, 164 years ago, this Church was organized. The original Covenant is still extant. It reads as follows:

## NEW MEDFIELD CHH. COVENANT.

Sep<sup>ber</sup> 29 : 1736.—

We whose names are hereunto Subscribed apprehending our Selves called of God into the Chh state of the Gospel do first of all confess our Selves unworthy to be so highly favoured of the Lord, & admire that free & rich Grace of his which triumphs over so great unworthiness, & then with an humble reliance on the aids of Grace therein promised for them, that in a sense of their inability to do any good thing, do humbly wait on him for all: we now thankfully lay hold on his Covenant, & would Choose the things that please him.

We declare our Serious Belief of the Christian Religion as contained in the Sacred Scriptures, & with Such a view thereof as the Confession of faith in our Churches has exhibited; heartily resolving to conform our lives unto the rules of that holy Religion as long as we live in the world.

We give up our Selves unto the Lord Jehovah who is the Father, & the Son, & the Holy Spirit, & a vouch him this day to be our God, our Father, our Saviour, & our Leader & receive him as our Portion forever.

We give up our Selves unto the blessed Jesus, who is the Lord Jehovah, & adhere to him as the head of his people,

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to Mr. Levi B. Chase, the best-informed student of Sturbridge history, for the following data as to the probable location of some of these tracts: 1. 100 acres, now mainly occupied by the McKelvey place, Fairview Park and the Eastern part of Mr. William Farquhar's farm; 2. 68 acres, the part of the Fiskdale Mill Co's farm next to the Brimfield line north of the road to Brimfield; 3. 58 acres, included in the farm of the late A. H. Morse in the southern part of Southbridge; 4. About 15 acres, now a part of the Southwick farm on Fisk Hill. Within two years, Mr. Rice sold about 75 acres of his land for £100, and before 1748 he had sold about 150 acres more, for £350, "old tenor." It seems clear that, considering the time and place, the provision made for the first minister in Sturbridge was not niggardly.

in the Covenant of grace, & rely on him as our Priest & our Prophet & our King, to bring us unto eternal blessedness.

We acknowledge our everlasting & indispensable obligations, to glorify our God in all the Duties, of a Godly, & a Sober, & a religious life; & very particularly in the duties of a Chh State, & a body of people associated for an obedience to him, in all the ordinances of the Gospel: And we thereupon depend upon his gracious assistances for our faithfull discharge of the duties thus incumbent on us.

We desire & intend, & (with Dependance on his promised, & powerful grace) we engage to walk together as a Chh of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the faith & order of the Gospel so far as we shall have the same revealed unto us: Conscienciously attending the publick worship of God, the Sacraments of this new Testament, the Discipline of his Kingdom, & all his holy institutions, in communion with one another, & watchfully avoiding sinfull stumbling blocks & contentions, as becomes a people whom the Lord hath bound up together in a bundle of life.

At the same time do we also present our offspring with us unto the Lord, purposing with his help to do our part in the method of a religious Education, that they may be the Lords.

And all this we do flying to the blood of the everlasting Covenant for the pardon of our many errors, & praying that the glorious Lord who is the great Shepherd would prepare & strengthen us for every good work to do his will, working in us that which will be well pleasing to Him; To whom be glory forever & ever Amen.

CALEB RICE

HENRY FISK

MOSES ALLEN

JONATHAN FOSKET

JOSEPH BAKER

JOSEPH MOFFIT

JOSEPH ALLEN

JONATHAN PERRY

DANELL THURSTIN

EBENEZER STEARNS

GEORGE WATKINS

JOSEPH CHENEY

SOLOMON ROOD

DANIEL FISK

EZEKIEL UPHAM

Having complied with the conditions laid down by the General Court and within seven years established here 50 families, each having "an House of Eighteen feet Square at Least," and having "settled an orthodox Minister," the Proprietors now petitioned for incorporation, and their

prayer was granted, June 24, 1738, the new town being named "Sturbridge."\*

With the incorporation of the Town, there began a series of complicated relations between Town, Church, and Proprietors, which it would be as hopeless as futile for us to attempt to unravel. An amusing illustration of the tangle is found in the warrant for the very first Sturbridge town-meeting; the article relating to the election of town officers is immediately followed by one which reads thus: "to furnish M<sup>r</sup> Rices Desk with a Cushing." It is not profitable to speculate on whether the "Cushing" was desired to ease the pastor's hands or his hearers' ears; and to this day the record leaves us in suspense as to whether it was or was not provided. The parson's salary was a regular town appropriation, sometimes provided for by assessment, sometimes out of the land tax. Each year the town made provision for cutting and hauling Mr. Rice's firewood, in quantities varying from thirty to fifty cords, sometimes electing a man to do this work, and sometimes devolving it upon the selectmen.† The town chose a person to "take Care of their meeting house." Appropriations for such purposes had been made for several years before the town came "into measures to provide a School," — a proposition which was "voted in the Negative" in 1740, and not adopted till two years later. In 1740 the Proprietors voted that the Town of Sturbridge should "have the property

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\*From this time on, the Proprietors' records are of little interest. Their meetings were rare, sometimes held in Medfield, sometimes at "the Public Meeting House in Sturbridge," and later in the Baptist meeting-house, from time to time. In the next few years one of their principal concerns was to relieve the necessities of John Comins, who claimed to have suffered losses in building the Proprietors' meeting-house. The benefit of a certain tract of land was granted to him, and after his death was administered for many years for his widow and children.

†The Town Records contain warrants for payments to the minister, and receipts signed by his own hand. *e.g.*

1741 / 2    Febru<sup>y</sup>—26.    M<sup>r</sup> treasurer please to pay to M<sup>r</sup> Caleb Rice two pounds ten Shillings for getting his own wood from March to June in the year 1740, as our order and advice

ISAAC NEWEL	} <i>Select-men.</i>
JOSEPH BAKER	
HENRY FISK	



the use and benifit forever of such roads and other lands given by Saltonstalls heirs to the s<sup>d</sup> proprietors." This, by the terms of the warrant for their meeting, included that land which had been given by the Saltonstall heirs for "a meeting-house place a burying place and a training feild together with the high ways through the s<sup>d</sup> farm."; but it did not include the meeting-house which the Proprietors had built at their own expense.

In the twenty-three years of this first pastorate, the cost of supporting the preaching the Gospel in Sturbridge was again and again "Largely Debaited" in town-meeting. The chief difficulty lay in the quite rapidly changing value of the currency. In March, 1741—2, the town granted Mr. Rice £20 additional, "In Consideration of Provitions being so deer." Payment was made in "old tenor," which was shrinking in purchasing power. The sums were increased until 1747 when it was voted to "make a grant of Eighty pounds old tenor addition To his Sallory for this prasant year and that The Manifactorys of the Land To Be a Rule for us To act By in order To our fulfilling our Contract maid with him for his maintainance as our Minister." Yet only two years later the sum was increased to "foure Hundred and Seventy pounds Eleven Shilings and one peny for M<sup>r</sup> Rices Sallory for the present year." In 1750—2 came an abrupt change; "the Town maid a Grant of fifty pounds Lawful mony To M<sup>r</sup> Rice for his Sallory the present year" and a like sum the following year, the parson "finding him self his own fier wood this was by a very Clear vote of the Town." In 1755 there was long debate over the question whether "the Town Will Settlet a Cartain Sum of Mony for M<sup>r</sup> Rices Yearly Sallory and To State it upon Dollors or upon Provition." A committee of nine was chosen to discuss the matter with the parson, but at the next meeting it was decided "not to State M<sup>r</sup> Rices Sallory," but to grant "Sixty pounds to be assest upon the poles and Estates in this town for M<sup>r</sup> Rice Seport the present year his finding his own fierwood." [£21 was that

year's appropriation for "Schooling the Children." Yet a twelvemonth had not passed before the subject had to be threshed out again in town-meeting. This time Mr. Rice was summoned, and declared that £55 would satisfy him, he furnishing his own fuel. After further debate, a committee was sent to inquire whether a smaller sum would not content him, and reported that he "Said to them that If the Town would Give him fifty three pounds Six Shillings and Eight pence yearly for his Seport he Should be Intirely Content and Easey." Thereupon the question was put whether the town would agree to pay this sum "unto M<sup>r</sup> Rice . . . for his Seport or Sallery Etch year he Shall Continue to preach the Gospel to us in this Town, . . . and it past in the Affirmative,"—and that fantastic sum, "in Lawfull Mony," continued to be appropriated annually until Mr. Rice's death in 1759.\*

Next to questions as to ministerial charges, the regulating of the pews was the one which gave most difficulty. Three years after the incorporation of the Town, it was voted that persons to whom pews were assigned should "enjoye [note the word!] them with their famelies Setting with them, During their life time" and a widow should "enjoye the Same with her family during her widdowhood," after which it should revert to the town, "to be disposed of as they Shall think fit the town paying the Cost of bulding the Same." A committee of three was then chosen to manage the affair of "lotting out the room for the pews," having "a due regard to

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\*It is little to the credit of Sturbridge that wrangling over money followed this worthy man to his grave. At a special town-meeting, Oct. 15, 1759, the question whether the Town would "Receive the Accompts of the Funeral Charges of our Late Paster Deceas<sup>d</sup>" "was Largely Debaited upon & after the Particular articles of the Funeral Charge of our Late Paster Dees<sup>d</sup> ware again Read it was put to vote whether the Town would allow the whole of the Accompts of Said Funeral Charge as then Brought in; it past in the Negative." A grant of £8 was made, and it was then voted that Mr. Rice's salary "Should Sease & Terminate at his Death." In considering this apparently niggardly action, it should not be forgotten that Caleb Rice had had the advantage of a fiftieth part of the land originally granted, and that an "additional parcel" had been given him at a later date.

age, to the first beginning in the town and to their baring Charges in the town, and to their usefullness." Four or five months later, March 1, 1741—2, the committee (Daniel Fisk, Capt. Moses Marcy and Dea. Isaac Newell) appointed for this fearsome task reported in town-meeting that they had "planed Divided and Numbered Said room into Eighteen parts for Eighteen pews, and have agreed to lodge Said plan with, the town Clerk for a gide and rule in building Said pews, . . . and we . . . did agree that according to the Instructions given us by the town, the following persons ought to have the Several pew Spots and ther liberty of pitching in the following order, viz.—Moses Marcy the first Choice, . . . \* and so on down to the eighteenth, whose feelings even at this late day must make some appeal to the sympathetic imagination.

In the early days the disposal of the pews of persons who had removed from town was made in town-meeting to specific individuals. Thus, it was voted, May 22, 1758, that "Jonathan Foskit have the pew Spot the north Side of the West Dore upon Shuch Tarms as the other pews in Town are built upon." Later it became customary to sell such pews "at Publick vendue to the highest bidder," withholding them from sale unless they "fetch'd more than the first cost," which was to be paid to the heirs of the late pew-owner. Meantime the town was paying for the care and ordinary repairs of the meeting-house, and a sizable bill "for the bords and nails for the Ministors pew old tennor" was ordered paid out of the "Town Stock."

But what had the Church been doing during these years? Its records are very meagre, and at the best could give little idea of the most vital activities. They record the election

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\*Records of Sturbridge, Vol. I, pp. 35-36. It may be of interest to record that this grading of these ancient Sturbridge worthies was in the following order:—1, Moses Marcy; 2, Henry Fisk; 3, Dea. Isaac Newel; 4, James Deneson; 5, Rowland Tailor; 6, Daniel Fisk; 7, Joseph Baker; 8, Joseph Cheney; 9, David Shumway; 10, David Morse; 11, Moses Allen; 12, Joseph Allen; 13, Joseph Smith; 14, Hensdel Clark; 15, Ezekiel Upham; 16, John Harding; 17, Caleb Harding; 18, Edward Foster.



of deacons, and indicate the carrying on of the regular religious exercises. At the first business meeting of the Church after its organization, it was voted to "move the matter of furnishing the Communion Table with vessels proper for the administering of the Lord's Supper . . . to the Proprietors of New Medfield to see whether they would contribute" toward that purpose.\*

A principal item of business at the annual meetings of the Church—often the *only* item—was to vote that every member pay to the deacon named three or four shillings apiece to provide for the communion bread and wine for the ensuing year. When Deacon Baker was asked, one year, to report "what the state of the Church property is," he reported simply in regard to the receipts and expenditures for this one purpose.

Mr. Rice's labors were productive of a gradual increase in the membership of the Church. During his twenty-three years of service, 100 members were added to the original fourteen. But there occurred, nevertheless, a notable secession, which figured largely both in church and town debates. As a result of a period of religious quickening, the "New Lights" or "Separates" came out from many of the conservative churches in the Province. In this vicinity about fifteen were of the new persuasion and ceased attending service at the center meeting-house, having built for themselves a house of worship near what is now Globe Village. This number included two who had held the office of deacon, and their withdrawal was the occasion of anxious meetings of the Church. A committee of three waited upon Deacon Fisk to "discourse with him, & see if he would return to the Chh. & serve still as a Deacon," but they reported that "he could not in conscience join with the Chh." As the secession grew, the Church voted: "the desire of the brethren of the Chh. [is] that those persons who are members of this Chh. & have separated from the

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\*Apparently these vessels were bought by the pastor, for twenty years later, after his death, the Church voted to pay his widow £1, 3s., out of the Church stock, on this account.

public Worship of God . . . give reasons in writing." Thirteen persons were notified by the pastor, and at the next meeting of the Church they presented the reasons for their withdrawal. These the Church declared not sufficient or satisfactory, and put upon record "the desire of the Chh. that their eyes might be opened that they might see their error they have run into." (March 24, 1748—9.) [A few years later this group of seceders became the nucleus of a regular Baptist church, with which fraternal relations were soon established.]

The records of our Church contain no indication that these her wayward children were disquieted by anything else than their own consciences and the reproachful admonitions of the mother Church whom they had forsaken. But "profane history" tells us that the Baptist preacher from Brimfield, who caused this agitation in Sturbridge, was seized by the constable for preaching here, dragged out of town, "and thrust into prison as a stroller and a vagabond," and Deacon Fiske and four other Sturbridge worthies were imprisoned in Worcester gaol. That such pains and penalties fell upon pious men was a consequence of the union of "Church and State" which still prevailed in this Province. Not the theological but the financial aspects of this revival made it the theme of several heated town-meetings. These Separates were bearing heavy burdens for maintaining their own religious services, and naturally wished exemption from paying rates for the support of Mr. Rice, whose ministrations they no longer desired. But the letter of the Province law was against them; the minister here at the center meeting-house was clearly the one towards whose settlement and maintenance "all the inhabitants and ratable estates lying within such town or part of a town, or place limited by law for upholding the public worship of God, shall be obliged to pay in proportion." Hence the town showed no disposition to exempt these men, and upon their refusal to pay, sundry of their goods and chattels were seized. Thus, in 1750 and

1751 the assessors took from Deacon Fiske five pewter plates and a cow; from Jonathan Perry a saddle and a steer; from John Streeter a kettle and pothooks, and from Mr. Blunt a trammel, shovel, tongs and a heifer. These forcible exactions aroused bitter feeling.\* The town records give evidence of angry debates, and also of earnest and diplomatic efforts to reconcile the opposing interests, and soon it came about that ministerial rates ceased to be levied upon those whom the assessors knew to be regular supporters of the Baptist church organization.

In the two years which intervened between the death of the first pastor and the settlement of his successor, it is of interest to note the responsibilities assumed respectively

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\*A Massachusetts law, originally passed in 1728, and renewed for a period of ten years in 1747, exempted Baptists and Quakers from ministerial rates or taxes, if these dissenters from the Standing Order could show certificates that they were members of and contributing to religious organizations of their own denomination, in the community in which they lived. Certificates for the members of this group of Sturbridge "Separates" had been written by two leading members of the second Baptist Church in Boston, but the Sturbridge authorities seem to have questioned whether these "Separates" were entitled to exemption as regular Baptists. Some details of this controversy are to be found in Backus's "A History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists," 2d. Ed., p. 94, and notes 1 and 2. The editor refers to "Rev. S. Hall's 'Collection of Papers' in which is included 'The Testimony of a People inhabiting the Wilderness,'"—an account of the beginnings of the Baptist Church in Sturbridge written by Henry Fisk, brother of Deacon David Fisk.

At least one special town-meeting was devoted to an effort to compose these differences, March 27, 1752. "The Seperats was desir<sup>d</sup> To Sete them Selves in the Body of Seets un the mens Side and the other in the Seets un the womans Side which they Did: the modrator [Moses Marcy] then desiered that thire might be a frindly Conferance, and to See if by Sum means or other Wee Could not make up the deferance between us Without going into the Law: and after a Long debate the Seperats Was askt Whether If the Creators and all the Goods that was Taken from them by Destress for thire Minister Rats in the year 1751 was Returned Would Satisfie them So that we might Live to gether Like Cristen frinds and nabouers they answered it would Satisfie them for that year with Resenable Satisfaction, and no further—then they ware desiered to bring in in writing what would Content them which they Did, accordingly Which was to Return from the years 1749 and one for the year 1748 which was John Streator. It was then Earnestly requested of the Seperats that as wee then did and do now beleve we had a good Righ to do as wee did yet for peace Sake that wee might meet one another and agree but this was Refus<sup>d</sup> by them." The Separates withdrew from the town-meeting after the town had voted not to make restitution of "what had been taken from them for Two years last past." The town chose a committee to "treet further with them," but there is no record of the result of their efforts.

by the Town and by the Church. The town, at the same meeting which acted in regard to the late pastor's funeral charges, made a grant of half a year's salary, at the old figure, to provide preaching at the center meeting-house, and chose a committee to have the matter in charge. But in later months the town did not hesitate to give very pointed instructions to this committee. Thus, "After Sum Considerable Debat" (January 7, 1760) it was "Put to vote by Diuideing the House & the Town all voted to Direct the Committee to M<sup>r</sup> Storrs for 4 Sabaths Preaching Saue onley one Man." A few months later, "After a Long Debate the Question Was put Whether The town would Aply to M<sup>r</sup> Whetney to preach any Longer with us and it past in the negitive," and again the committee was directed to apply to Mr. Storrs for further service.

Meantime the Church was seeking guidance in its momentous choice. In July, 1760, a fast was held; pastors of neighboring churches were called on for help, and the congregation were bidden to join in "seeking to God in Jesus Christ for light and direction in the settlement of a gospel minister, and to the Head of the Church to fit and qualify one with his gifts and graces for to be a minister of Jesus Christ for us." During the summer months the desired leading seems to have been felt, for when, in an October town-meeting, the question was put "Whether the Town Directed the Committee to Apply To M<sup>r</sup> Joshua Pain to preach with us a longer time then he has as yet Ingaged for in order for Settlement Try<sup>d</sup> By Deuideing the house and it past in the afiremetive to a man 72 being present." In January the Church appointed another day of fasting and prayer "in order to give M<sup>r</sup> Joshua Paine a call to be our Minister." This call was given unanimously, and a few weeks later, in town-meeting, on the question of concurring with the Church in this action, "thire was ninty three Vots brought in and al for M<sup>r</sup> Joshua Paine." It was further voted to give him, £200 for a settlement and an annual salary of £66, 13s.,

4d., while for the expenses attending his ordination there was appropriated £13, 6s., 8d.,—precisely the sum to a penny which had just been appropriated for “schooling the children in Town” for a year! On the seventeenth of June, 1761, upon a platform erected under the brow of this hill, in the presence of a great throng, the Rev. Joshua Paine, was ordained, and then began the longest pastorate which this Church has ever enjoyed, a service of 38 years.\*

At about this time there was frequent debate in town-meetings over petitions for permission to build pews in the meeting-house. Thus, in March, 1761, half a dozen men requested “Liberty of Building apue over the mens Stairs,” and this was “Excepted upon the same Destrictions of the other pues.” Two months later a petition of six men praying “for Liberty to build a pew wher the hind Seat is in the front Gallery for them and Wifes” was “Granted Resarueing Room in Said pew for a Thything [man]† to Set.” In 1762 there was presented a petition signed by fourteen women, “Shewing that the Hind Seat in the Womans Side Gallery is So Low that they Cannot See the Minister and that the other Seats are full and Crouded that so that it is uery uncomfortable Setting.” “After Sum Debait” they were granted “Liberty to build a Pew where the Hind Seat is.”

The meeting-house, as these requests indicate, was becoming inadequate, and it was a constantly recurring question whether it was worth while to make any repairs upon it. In 1773 the town voted to build a new meeting-house, but

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\*Most unfortunately the records for a period of more than thirty years have been lost. It is said that Mr. Paine's house was broken into, and the church book disappeared with other things stolen.

†The tithingman in Puritan New England had other duties than the preserving of order and decorum in the meeting-house. He was supposed to see that everyone went to church, and that there was no travel on the Sabbath except in cases of necessity or mercy. Throughout the week, as well as on Sunday, he had a paternal oversight over family life and the orderliness of the community. For a comparison of the tithingman and the constable, see H. B. Adams, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Oct. 21, 1881. Tithingmen were chosen in the first Sturbridge town-meetings, and from two to five of these officers were annually elected until about 1840,—long after ministerial rates had ceased to be levied in town-meeting.



some months later this action was reconsidered and it "was the Mind of the Town to omit for the present Building a new Meeting House." For the next few years the thoughts of the people were engrossed and their purses burdened by the Revolutionary War, so that till peace was made no further projects for building were brought forward. In April, 1783, however, a committee "reported unanimously the meeting-house was so decayed it was not worth Repairing," and May 13, 1783, by a vote of 50 to 13 it was decided to "Build a New Meeting House near the Spot where the Old one Now Stands."

Probably there is not one person in the assembly gathered here to-day, to whom the great white meeting-house which our forebears were then about to build did not come to seem almost as much a natural, an inevitable feature of the Sturbridge landscape as is Fisk Hill. As a matter of fact, however, at every step in the locating, planning, and building of that meeting-house there arose such a clash of opinions as would seem to indicate that the belligerent energies formerly directed against the British were here finding a new and much-needed outlet.\*

Again and again decisions were made by a single vote. In the first place, there was opposition to building any new church, and five times in the two years following the above vote, that question was forced,† the last time (April 11, 1785, —nearly a year after the frame was raised) the question being "whether it was the mind of the Town that the Building Committee should Desist from any further Compleating the

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\*A reading of the town records at the time of the building of the town hall deepens the conviction that in the days of our grandsires, when building operations were concerned, there was a high percentage of "cantankerousness" in the atmosphere of Sturbridge Common.

†Over-hasty action on the strength of one of these votes seems indicated by a bill presented by Col. Crafts for charges against the Town in 1784. It contains the following interesting items:

"to dinnering Master Paine 1784 when keeping School 56 din.s	1 . . 8 . . 0
for three days Service procuring a Master Workm <sup>n</sup> for the Meeting house	
at 18/ receiv <sup>d</sup> an order for 9/	9 . . 0
for Boarding him & horse 2 days—& Liquor	5 . . 0
to 2 dollars paid him for his disappointment	12 . . 0

New Meeting House" this was "passed in the Negative by a very large Majority."

The second question over which differences arose was as to the precise location for the new edifice. Opinions seemed in irreconcilable conflict. Accordingly, "to Advise where in their Opinion a Meeting House ought to stand in order to accommodate the Inhabitants," there was chosen a disinterested committee of distinguished citizens of other towns, to "Senter the Town" and "pitch upon a Spot for the New proposed Meeting House," "the Town to abide by their Judgment." At three different town-meetings the makeup of this committee was changed. The last named upon the records consisted of "Gen<sup>l</sup> Putnam of Rutland, Cap<sup>t</sup> Simeon Smith of Ashford, and Edward Rawson, Esq<sup>r</sup> of Leicester," (March 29, 1784). The dimensions for the new building were debated in town-meeting, determined, reconsidered, and determined again. The first building committee of ten was dismissed at the end of two months and a new one constituted, having a minority of the members of the old one; and its makeup was later changed. How the building operations should be financed was another anxious question. After various other projects had been rejected, the town made a grant of £300 to be levied on the "Polls and Estates of the Inhabitants of the Town belonging to the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Paines Society for the purpose of Building the New Meeting House," and a grant of £600 "to be leuied on the Pews." This was reconsidered later, but seems finally to have been carried into effect, after at least one committee on pew appraisal had been displaced by another.\*

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\*In an undated document, headed "Estimation Paper," 72 names are listed, and against each name is written a sum of money which probably stood as a gauge of the man's ministerial tax and as a basis for the allotment of pews in the meeting-house that was soon to be built, in accordance with the vote: "He that paid most for Real & Personal Estate in the last Ministerial Tax, to draw the first Pew." (Dec. 29, 1783.) The sums range from £20-14s-7d down to £4-14s-6d. In two or three cases a son is grouped with his father. That this belongs to the years immediately following the Revolutionary War and that the Rev. Joshua Paine ministered to a branch of the Church Militant is indicated by the fact that this list of 72 names included one Colonel, 12 Captains and 11 Lieutenants,—one in every three bore a military title!

The massive frame of the new structure had been raised in June, 1784, but it was nearly two and a half years later before the building was ready to be dedicated. As it approached completion, the town authorized the building committee to "call on the Inhabitants of this Town who are Disposed freely to afford their service with their teams" to assemble on a stated day in the first week of November "to Wharfe up the New Meeting House,"—an admirable precedent in co-operation, which has been followed here within the past few weeks. There yet remained the task of examining the report of the building committee, and the town "went largely into debate over the subject," at three or four town-meetings, finally choosing for this auditing task "a committee from the Baptist Society that were not Interested in the Center Meeting House"; and on the basis of their report, after further debate at several meetings, an adjustment was made. With the sale and removal of the old meeting-house, and with the recording of the certificates of pew ownership in the town book, this enterprise of many years was brought to a conclusion.

During the early years of Mr. Paine's ministry there were constant distractions arising from the events which led up to the separation from England and the Revolutionary War. In the midst of these disturbances, Mr. Paine showed himself a worthy leader of the church militant. He was made chairman of the committee to "Draft Something binding For Every Individual in this Town to sign" pledging strict observance of the Association (the non-importation agreement). On the first Monday in December, 1774, on the training-field there was a great concourse of the "Companies of Foot, The Minuet Men, the Troop all belonging to Town; the Company of A. lar<sup>m</sup> men, all Marched into the Meeting House in good order. Haveing fixed themselves together, there being Silence & good order . . after Sollem Prayer to God & Singing, the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Joshua Paine Preached a Sermon from Psalms." Five months before the battle of Lexington, our Sturbridge citizens in town-meeting were



already providing military stores, when Mr. Paine "Proposed to the Town that He would give one Half Barrel of Powder to the Town as Soon as it could be procur<sup>d</sup>," an offer which was accepted with thanks. When it proved impossible to secure this powder, he made a new proposition; "I find it still my Duty to bare my part in the Calamities that are Common to us," he wrote, and therefore he made the town a present of £100 old tenor, and further offered, on security from the town, to wait one year for what should be due on his salary the following June, "and Longer unless Mortality or Something Extraordinary prevents."

A few years later, June 17, 1778, the town voted "to a man" that some consideration ought to be made to Mr. Paine on account of the appalling depreciation of the Continental currency, and two men were chosen from each school district to collect subscriptions of money or "necessary Articles for the Support of Life for M<sup>r</sup> Paine." In 1779, when the town was disposed to pay to Mr. Paine the money for which he had offered to wait, a committee reported that "haveing Innumarated a number of articles of Necessaries Provisions &c." . . . "upon an everage of the above Mentioned articles According to Calculation the amount is Twenty for one increased Since the year 1775." Accordingly for the £53 which the parson relinquished in 1775 he was paid £1060 in the depreciated currency of four years later. During the later years of his ministry, repeated adjustments of his salary had to be made because of currency changes. Mr. Paine died in the closing week of 1799. The town paid his funeral charges and continued his salary to the end of his fiscal year. In town-meeting a committee chosen to supply the pulpit, was directed to consult Mr. Leonard, the highly respected pastor of the Baptist Society, and during the winter months under his ministrations a united people met once more in the center meeting-house.

The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 went a long distance toward divorcing Church and State by its requirement

that "all moneys paid by the subject to the support of public worship . . shall, if he require it, be uniformly paid to the support of the public teacher . . of his own religious sect or denomination, provided there be any on whose instructions he attends." Accordingly, in the town-meetings of the following decade, petitions for the abatement of ministerial rates "since the Constitution took place" are frequent. In 1782 a committee reported that "all . . who act from principals of Religion mentioned in S<sup>d</sup> Requests who have petitioned for abatement of Ministerial Taxes ought of Right to be abated, upon producing proper Certificates as the Law directs;" and they were bidden to bring their certificates to town-meeting where from time to time discrimination was exercised as between different petitioners.\*

In the years 1780 to 1800 the relation in which the town stood toward the center meeting-house was ill defined. There was a growing tendency to shift over upon "the Society belonging to the Centre Meeting House" or upon "M<sup>r</sup> Paine's hearers" the cost of repairs upon the church building; yet in many ways the town acted toward it as toward its own property. Thus, October 30, 1786, the town voted "not

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\*The following certificates show the form in which liability for Ministerial Rates was determined.

"To the Gentlemen Assessors of the Town of Sturbridge,—

The following is a list of those persons who have certificated themselves from the Congregational Society in Sturbridge since the Last Returns. (Here follow 20 names.)

A true list from the Records of Sturbridge, Attest, David Wight, Town Clerk.  
Sturbridge, Oct. 4, 1828.

#### "CERTIFICATE FOR UNIVERSALISTS.

We, the Subscribers, Edward Turner, public teacher, of the religious sect or denomination called Universalists, and of a Society of the same in the town of Charlton, and Jabez Lathe and Ephraim Willard, Committee thereof, do hereby certify, that Maj. Ephraim Morey, Capt. John Boyden, Isaac Hobbs, Lieut. William Bowen, Stephen Jones and Caleb Nichols, are regular members of said Society, and that they pay liberally towards the support of preaching, and attend with us when able at our stated times and places for religious worship.

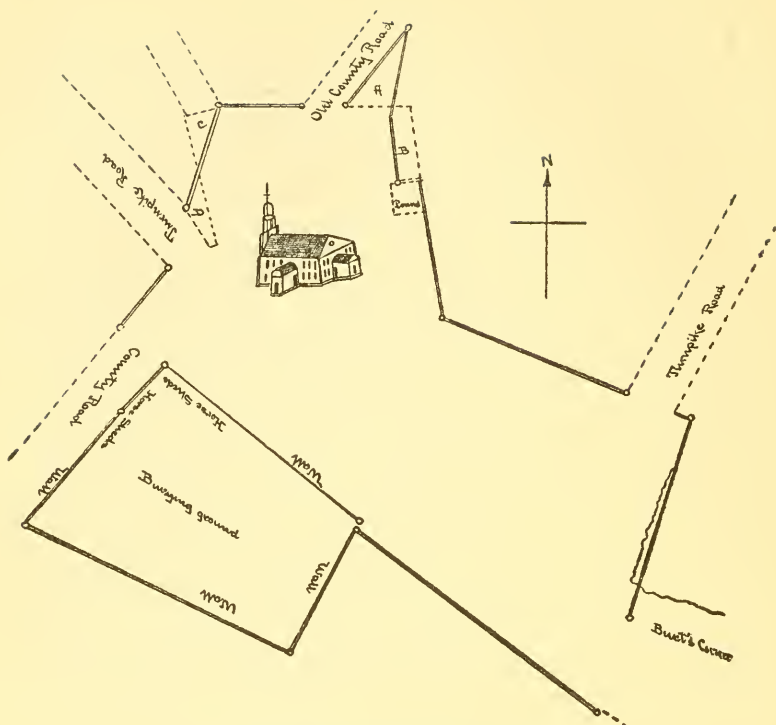
Charlton, August 28th, 1807.

Edward Turner,  
Jabez Lathe,  
Ephraim Willard."

to Build a Powder House," but "to Deposit the Town Stock of Ammunition in the uper part of the New Meeting House, and that there be two Electrical rods provided and put up at the New Meeting House and a good lock and key for the Door leading in the upper part of s<sup>d</sup> House." A year later the selectmen were directed to store in the same place not only the ammunition but also "the warlike tools" or "intrenching tools" belonging to the town. In 1799, however, it was voted to remove the town's stock of powder, etc., to an equally felicitous depository for explosives, the hearse house, which the selectmen were instructed to put in "Compleat order to receiving the town's magazine."

It was in town-meeting that Cap<sup>t</sup> Wheelock, on his own petition, was given "liberty to take a seat in the elder pew." It was in town-meeting that a committee was chosen in 1791 "to view and mark out the ground for warming Houses and Horse Stables" near the meeting-house,—a subject which kept recurring, but on which nothing was done for years. In 1794 it was voted: "there shall be no Stoves [foot-stoves] left in the Center meeting house after the public worship is over;" any found there "shall be forfeited to the town."

In this same year the aesthetic began to make its appeal. The town voted to "give Liberty to have the porch at the west End of the Center meeting house taken away, and instead thereof to have a Steeple or Bell Cony [balcony?] built," provided this could be done by special subscription "free from Laying any tax upon the town," and the steeple was forthwith erected. Apparently a bell was also secured in 1794 by private subscription. In the first flush of joy over this new acquisition, a committee reported the following schedule of bell-ringing; "The bell to be rung ten minutes at a time three times on each day beginning precisely at the following hours viz in the morning at five of the Clock from the first of April to the first of October and at six o Clock from the first of October to the first of April, & at twelve O Clock



STURBRIDGE COMMON, IN 1821.

This plot of the Common is here reproduced, on a reduced scale, from the sketch on p. 465, of the Sturbridge Town Records, 1798-1824. It gives an idea of the appearance and position of the Meeting-house when it had three entrance porches, and before it was turned, in 1864, until it faced southwest, instead of northwest, as in this sketch.

The inscription upon the chart is as follows:

"References.

- A. Land of Abijah Prouty Containing 12 square rods, which he proposes to exchange for the Lot B Containing 11 square rods, belonging to the town.
- D. Land of Capt. Perez Walker Containing 6 square rods, which he proposes to exchange for the lot C Containing 7 square rods belonging to the town.

This Survey was made May 3d 1821, by a Committee appointed by the town for that purpose and exhibits a view of the Common and Burying Ground in the Town of Sturbridge. The Common lying North of the Burying Ground Contains Six acres and Seventy rods including all roads passing over it. This Plat was Laid down by a scale of Eight rods to an inch.

Samuel Freeman Surveyor."

at noon and at nine at night Except Saturday Evenings and then at Eight o Clock." The schedule for Sundays, Fast Day and Thanksgiving was elaborate. It was further provided: "When the Saxon is notified of a Death he shall toll the bell fifteen minutes and after a pause of one minute if the Deceased be a male he shall Toll one minute [stroke?] if a female two minutes [strokes?] and after one other pause he shall toll the year of the Deceased persons age and shall toll the bell at the interment at town meetings as the Selectmen shall order."

This report was accepted, but the record does not make it plain whether its recommendations were put in practice. A few months later it was voted that the bell be rung "on Sundays and at all public meetings as usual and particularly at Funerals." The inference may be that the other ringings were to be dispensed with. But later, for a number of years, by annual vote of the town the bell was rung "at twelve at noon and nine at night, and tolled for deaths, and on all funeral occasions, and rung for all town-meetings." A clock was another acquisition from some private source, but neither bell nor clock seems to have given satisfaction. Experiments were made in "new-hanging the bell."\* Twenty years later the sum of \$100 was assessed upon the whole town for repairs on the "Town Bell," but the results were still so unsatisfactory that the town instructed its committee "not to pay any thing for the bell in its present situation," and in 1819 the question was referred to the committee on law-suits, with power to act, whether the town should authorize the commencing of

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\*In 1807 minor repairs were made upon the frame of the bell carriage, etc. Some receipted bills show that the wages of the townsman who assisted were \$1.25 a day while those of the man in charge were \$2.00 The bill includes these two items:

	D	C
"to boarding Andrew Batchelder four days	1	00
to two mugs of tody	0	— 40"

The man who furnished the timber—he was for many years Town Clerk—submitted an itemized bill, which had been fully summarized when this separate item was added as an afterthought:

"1½ mug Todd at Mr. Browns	\$0.30"
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action against certain parties named "for the recovery of Damage for a bad Town Bell." Five years later, April 5, 1824, the Town voted to exchange the old bell and clock for "a good new warranted bell of equal weight to the old one, hung & tried before the old bell and clock are delivered." But the clock did not prove salable; eighty years later its dismantled works were still standing in the belfry-tower. For several years a blank dial bore witness to a bad bargain in clocks, until 1831 when it was voted that "the old clock face be painted white with the rest of the house." It was in 1833 that the Revere Bell was obtained, whose clear tones once more gladden our ears.

Within a few weeks after Mr. Paine's death, the town voted "Unanimously to Come into some method to Settle a Gospel minister in the Center meeting house in Sturbridge," and when, a few months later, the definite question arose, what action the town would take for the encouragement of Mr. Otis Lane "to settle in this town in the work of the ministry," it was voted that the town of Sturbridge should pay him \$400 annually, "so long as he shall continue in the work of the ministry in this town." But a novelty was added in the proviso that in case a termination of the contract should be desired by Mr. Lane, or by "two thirds of the legal voters in this town of Mr. Lane's Society that are his hearers that pay taxes for his support," the party wishing the change should state reasons and give a year's notice, at the end of which time a Council might dissolve the relation "without making of it a question." Hitherto the settlement of a pastor had been for life. Did this new arrangement indicate that during Mr. Paine's thirty-eight years of service a new generation had arisen that had been wanting a change? Be that as it may, the forming of this terminable contract with the new minister introduced a pastorate which was to prove full of discouragements. The atmosphere of town-meeting had become unsympathetic for the debate and decision of matters relating to the Church. The Baptist Society

managed its own affairs by itself; but each year the question of Mr. Lane's salary came up in town-meeting, and a grudging grant was made of a sum "to be assessed upon M<sup>r</sup> Lane's hearers." Two or three times it was voted "not to raise money for the support of the Rev<sup>d</sup> Otis Lane," the evident intent being to throw the whole responsibility definitely upon the people of his own religious body; but apparently it was in each instance decided that the existing laws and the form of agreement at the time of the pastor's settlement required assessment of his salary by town authority. In 1811 it was voted that \$100 for completing repairs on the center meeting-house be "assessed on M<sup>r</sup> Lane's hearers," as had come to be the case with the charges for care of the building. In the spring of 1815 Mr. Lane informed the town of his wish for a dissolution of the pastoral relation, giving as his reason: "the stipulated means of my support are found after a long and thorough trial to be greatly inadequate to the purpose. Hence have necessarily arisen embarrassments and perplexities evidently inconsistent with the office and a proper discharge of the responsibilities of a stated minister of Christ." To a town committee, which waited upon him "to hear his proposals," he replied, with unfortunate curtness, that "he had no proposals to make,"—a reply which apparently gave offence where none was intended, for at its next meeting, the following month, upon the article in the warrant, to see if the town would pay Mr. Lane a reasonable sum in view of the great increase in the cost of the "principal articles of use," it was voted to "allow him \$200 in case he leaves town." With praiseworthy accuracy the town clerk adds the explanatory note [the only one I have observed in the records covering more than a century]: "The vote was passed in these words. I understand the meaning of the mover to be, when M<sup>r</sup> Lane ceased to be our Minister."

Months passed. Mindful of the terms of the contract, the town authorities summoned a special town-meeting to assemble one year and a day from the date of Mr. Lane's

notice. It was an unprecedented condition which brought the voters to the meeting-house that day; a good deal of feeling had been aroused, and keen curiosity as to what the outcome was to be. But when the meeting was ready to listen to Mr. Lane, whose notice of a wish for dismissal had been for twelve months the talk of the town, he did not take the floor himself, nor did any representative of his speak a word in his behalf; whereupon the town voted "not to grant Rev<sup>d</sup> Otis Lane any further assistance to enable him to continue preaching here." Almost another year had passed before Mr. Lane broke his silence, and then it was to withdraw his request for a dismissal,—a request which he had apparently made with no intent that it be granted, but merely in the hope that it might lead to the payment of a more adequate salary. In a thinly attended meeting of the Church, its members voted that they did not wish his dismissal, but in town-meeting a large majority, on a motion alleging "the divided state of the people," voted in favor of putting an end to Mr. Lane's pastorate. A church Council considered the situation, and declined to dissolve the pastoral relation; but a month later, the Church meantime having voted 7 to 3 that under existing circumstances it was expedient to dismiss the pastor, the Council did so, February 24, 1819, on the ground that the opposition to him was so great as to preclude his usefulness.

This unpleasant episode in our church annals has been told in some detail in order to make clear the tangled relations which still subsisted in many a Massachusetts community between the Church as a religious organization and the town. During his eighteen years of service here, this able and devoted minister felt himself constantly hampered and beset. To the embarrassments which were inherent in the situation, he added by his ill-judged and hardly ingenuous request for dismissal. Financial troubles were not the only discouragements which attended his work. In the year 1801 this Church suffered a secession of 20 of its members who later became the Congregational Church in Southbridge. Interest in



religious matters was at a low ebb in the town, and the pastor's records—for in those days the pastor was also the clerk of the Church—show that he was downcast. But at length the long-delayed harvest began to appear. In the months from February to June, 1810—just one hundred years ago—he baptized fifteen persons. In the margin of the record he writes: "To the praise and glory of Divine Grace be it spoken and remembered that at this time God remembered mercy & poured out his spirit on this Church & people." But reaction followed: in the years 1814 to 1816 but one person was admitted to the church. "None, it seems, says 'Where is God, my maker?'" writes the disheartened pastor. Yet in the last year of his ministry, despite the controversy which had arisen, there began a deepening of religious feeling which resulted in the addition of thirty members to the Church.

During the summer of 1819 the Church determined to extend a call to the Rev. Alvan Bond, a recent graduate of Andover, who had been supplying the pulpit, and through a committee requested the town to concur in their choice and to make provision for his support. The warrant for this special town-meeting summoned only "the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of Sturbridge qualified by law to vote in the settlement of a Congregational minister." By a large vote it was decided that Mr. Bond should "be the religious teacher of this Society." A salary of \$600 was voted to him, and the contract was to be terminable after six months' notice at the option of either party. The new pastor was greatly cheered by the large accessions at the beginning of his service here. But soon the tide ebbed. In 1822 there was but one member admitted, and that person came by letter. In the following year two were admitted by letter and only one on confession of faith. The record's margin contains the very human comment: "Here commences a time of stupidity." In the next two years there were no accessions: they are noted as: "Years of declension till November, 1825." But the pastor had been tireless in his labors,

and the harvest now was ripe. In the year 1826, 55 persons united with this Church, and the record's margin breaks forth: "This year God appears in his glory to build up Zion. To him be *all* the glory!" Five years later there was another great revival which brought 44 new members into the Church. In the midst of this time of refreshing, the pastor requested a dismissal that he might accept the professorship of Sacred Literature in the Theological Seminary at Bangor, Me. His devoted people granted his request, regretfully recognizing his "call to a more elevated station of usefulness."

On the day before Mr. Bond's dismissal a young man, fresh from his studies at Andover, preached his first sermon here, and when, a week later, the *Society*\* voted to "employ a public Teacher of Religion," it was this Mr. Joseph S. Clark whom they directed their prudential committee to employ "as a candidate for settlement in the work of the Ministry, if they can so agree with him." A month had not passed before both Church and Society, by unanimous vote, were ready to concur in extending to Mr. Clark a call to "settle with them in the work of the Ministry as their Pastor and Teacher." In his letter of acceptance, he wrote: "By the good providence of God, I am now ready as much as in me lies to preach the Gospel of Peace to you at Sturbridge." Such was the auspicious beginning of a most harmonious and fruitful pastorate. The young minister entered upon his work with zeal. In a single year "94 were added to the church by profession and 11 by letter." An active campaign was carried on, along many lines, against intemperance, with the result that this vice which had been "the occasion of a very great proportion of cases of discipline in the church and more dishonor to religion than any other sin," was greatly reduced.† In 1834 the town was divided into districts

\*For the organization of the parish or Society, see p. 45.

†The Church adopted a vigorous set of resolutions, May 15, 1834, including the following: "That every Christian Church ought to practice entire abstinence from ardent spirit as a drink, and that no person ought to be admitted into the Church of Christ and no one shall hereafter be received into this Church but upon the practice of entire abstinence from the use, the manufacture and the sale of ardent spirit as a drink."

embracing from 12 to 20 members, and to each of these were assigned two brethren to visit from house to house, and hold meetings. Results were soon apparent. In 1836 the membership of this Church reached its high-water mark,—337, of whom 115 were males and 222 females. The following year was one of great industrial depression throughout the country, and agitation over the slavery question was felt to be causing “spiritual dearth” in this community; yet the pastor’s record for that discouraging year reads: “The Sabbath School was never known to be in a more flourishing state. . . The number in the central School is increased to nearly 400; the Infant School to about 60. A school was also gathered in the Southern section of the town, numbering 50 or more, which has been maintained through the season.” When ill health compelled Mr. Clark to seek dismissal in December, 1838, he could record that during these seven years of service in this, his only pastorate, “the Lord has added to this Church 203 by profession, and 56 by letters of recommendation, 259 in all. The whole number now connected with it is 325.”\*

Mr. Clark was the first historian of Sturbridge. His “Historical Sketch,” an address delivered July 4, 1838, ten days after the centennial anniversary of the incorporation of the town, and his outline of Sturbridge “Ecclesiastical History,” delivered in his own church the following Sunday, are addresses of exceptional merit, to which every later student of Sturbridge history must turn with gratitude. They reveal qualities of mind and heart which must have added greatly to his effectiveness as a public teacher of

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\*Within six months after his regretted withdrawal from this pastorate, Mr. Clark was appointed Secretary of the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society, in which position he rendered many years of effective service. Two of his children have continued in missionary labors. His son, a native of this town, for many years Editorial Secretary of the Congregational Home Missionary Society, we welcome here to-day as the preacher of the dedicatory sermon (The Rev. Joseph B. Clark, D. D.) His daughter, Mrs. Caswell-Broad, for seventeen years worked among the Seneca Indians in Western New York, was then actively engaged in the North End Mission in Boston, and later entered the service of the American Home Missionary Society as Secretary of the Woman’s Department.

religion in this community. The annual "Summaries" which he inserted in the Church records are very human documents. After comparing the pages which bear his writing with the records of the past forty years, I can not help deploring the change by which the pastor ceased to be the clerk of the Church. Within my own memory four men before the present incumbent have served as pastors of this Church, yet except for two sets of valedictory resolutions—not the most valid material for the historian—I defy any man to detect in the records or documents of this Church a trace of the personality of these men who have been charged with the chief responsibility in carrying on the work of the Church among us. What have they sought to do? What methods have they proposed and tried? What obstacles have they encountered? What Christian co-operation have they received? What has been effected? Hardly a hint to the answer to such questions is to be found in the records. They are perfunctory minutes of parliamentary proceedings and statistics of baptisms, and of church membership. Interesting and significant changes have been taking place in the spiritual life of this town during these two-score years. I cannot help thinking that it would have meant much not only for church history but also for church *life*, if each of these pastors had felt it incumbent on him to attempt the difficult task of recording these changes, as they affected the life and work of this Church. Nor can I doubt that a systematic and effective religious leader in such a community as this would find it a stimulating if not always a cheering task, if at the end of each year, he should follow the example of Pastor Clark, and set down, for future generations to read, a "Summary," an annual "balance-sheet" of the work in that corner of the Lord's vineyard committed to his charge.

With the withdrawal of Mr. Clark, there ended the fifth pastorate of this Church. The service of those five men had spanned two years more than a century. It is significant of a wide-spread change in ecclesiastical relations that the

next five pastorates filled but fifty years, while, since 1888 we have had four acting pastors, no one of whom has been installed. It is impossible in the time at my disposal to attempt more than the barest summary of what we might call the mediaeval and modern, as contrasted with the ancient history of this Church.

### LATER PASTORATES.

Within a few weeks of the resignation of Mr. Clark, the Church voted unanimously to extend a call to the Rev. David R. Austin. The Society concurred, and on May 1, 1839, he began a pastorate of devoted service which continued for twelve years and five months. In the first year of his work here he recorded: "The tone of religious feeling has been very low during the year past. Oh that we may experience a refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Special efforts resulted, the following year, in a growing number of admissions to the Church. During his pastorate the accessions numbered 205,—148 on profession of faith and 57 by letter; but these were more than offset by the very large losses, 211,—86 by death and 125 by letter to other churches. "The year 1849" he writes "may be regarded as a year of *special judgment* to this Chh. and to the inhabitants of this town. The pestilence that walketh in darkness and wasteth at noonday has swept *ten* of our most highly esteemed and valued members into eternity, . . . all strong and polished pillars in this Zion, 57 persons have died in this town during the year, almost double the usual mortality. An epidemic proved fatal to adults in the Spring and the dysentery to children in the Summer. There has been no special attention to religion in this Chh. during the past year; not one has been added to its numbers by profession." "Desirous of relieving in some measure the burdens of those who remain," Mr. Austin voluntarily relinquished \$50 of his salary. In the summer of 1851, his request for a dismission because of continued ill health was reluctantly granted. In his last entry



in the Records he declared: "Great harmony and peace have prevailed. . . Nothing but an imperious necessity could induce me to leave so delightful a field of labor."\*

For eight or nine months the Church remained without a pastor, there being a feeling on the part of a considerable number that it was "not expedient & in the circumstances in which we are placed to give a call to any one." June 2, 1852, the Rev. Hubbard Beebe was installed; two years later (October 24, 1854) because of the inadequacy of his salary and the feeling that the labors and embarrassments of his position were proving too severe a tax upon his strength," he was dismissed at his own request, having made little impress upon the Church or community.†

For nearly eighteen months the Church remained without a pastor. Then the Rev. Sumner G. Clapp, who for some time had been supplying the pulpit very acceptably, was installed. He was a man of peace, who won the affections of his people. In 1862, mindful of the increasing financial burdens of the community, as "a duty and privilege," he voluntarily relinquished a considerable portion of his salary. Because of advanced years and ill-health, at his own request he was dismissed, Sept. 2, 1862, cherishing the most cordial feeling for the people among whom he had labored.

His successor was the Rev. Marshall B. Angier, installed July 1, 1863. During his pastorate of four years 84 persons united with the Church on profession of their faith, 41 being admitted on one Sunday (July 3, 1864). Benevolent contributions were substantially increased and the meeting-house was turned upon its foundation, and thoroughly renovated at an expense of about \$2500. But the pastorate, which

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\*Mr. Austin found in South Norwalk, Ct., a climate better suited to his health. He continued in the pastorate in that place till 1865, and died there in 1879.

†Mr. Beebe became pastor of the Congregational Church in West Haven, Ct. Later he engaged in secretarial work successively with the American Sunday School Union, the American Bible Society, and the American Seamen's Friend Society. He died June 21, 1885.



ended June 5, 1867, was a turbulent one, and left the Church sadly divided.\*

In the fall of the same year the Rev. Martin L. Richardson, who had been pastor of the neighboring Evangelical Church in Globe Village, was engaged as acting pastor; he was installed June 29, 1871. Knowing thoroughly the difficulties through which the Church had been passing, he strove earnestly to heal the breach. He proved himself a useful citizen, serving the town as a member of the school committee and as a representative in the General Court. He was a musician of taste and skill, and a zealous helper in the work of temperance and literary societies in the community. Toward the end of this pastorate a radical change was made in the Sunday program which had obtained for nearly 150 years: by vote of the Society in 1885 it was decided to have but one preaching service on the Sabbath. Until that time there had been a sermon both morning and afternoon, and a less formal service in the evening. Mr. Richardson was dismissed Oct. 14, 1888, having rounded out twenty-one years of service of this Church and community.

These five later leaders, like their predecessors, here fought the good fight, against foes often harder to vanquish than many the first pastors encountered. For economic and industrial conditions changed the whole aspect of the town. In our shops and mills, yes and on our farms as well, the place of families who for generations had worshipped in the old meeting-house on the hill were taken by people whose race and creed were such that this Church could not minister to

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\*It is something more than a coincidence that the Unitarian Society in Sturbridge was organized during this pastorate, by persons who professed "a growing dissatisfaction with the ministrations of Religion in Sturbridge,"—a feeling that those ministrations did not answer "the wants of individuals craving a higher form of intellectual culture and a more comforting and encouraging dispensation of its truths." Preamble to report of the preliminary meeting, March 14, 1864.

After leaving Sturbridge, Mr. Angier held pastorates of Congregational Churches in Haydenville, Ipswich and Foxboro. In 1892 he became acting pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Windsor, N. Y., and held that position at the time of his death, Feb. 25, 1894.

their religious needs nor enlist their membership and support. Largely in consequence of these changes it came about that, despite large accessions in two or three periods of revival, the admissions to this Church on profession of faith and by letter have fallen far short of making good the losses by death and by removal from town.

There are those in this presence who recall every one of these men. They have now all passed to their reward, with the exception of Mr. Richardson, who, though retired from the ministry, is still rendering efficient and valued Christian service as one of the overseers of the poor in the town of Montague, Massachusetts. We had all hoped that we might have his benignant presence with us to-day, and that we might hear again the noble voice which for so many years led this people in prayer and in praise. Letters have been received expressing his deep regret that he found it impossible to participate in a service in which he has the keenest interest.

The following names complete the list of pastors of this Church:

Theophilus Beaizley, 1888—1891.

Alexander Wiswall, 1891—1892.

Augustus M. Rice, 1893—1902.

John C. Hall, 1902 to the present time.\*

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\*BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

THEOPHILUS BEAIZLEY:

Born in Tipton, Staffordshire, England, 1833. Received his theological training in the London Theological Seminary. He was sent to Australia by the London Missionary Society in 1858. His longest pastorates were in Sydney, N. S. W., and Woodland, California. Since leaving Sturbridge he held pastorates of the Presbyterian Church at Anaheim and later at Fullerton, Cal. He died at the latter place, Feb. 15, 1908.

ALEXANDER WISWALL:

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, 1846. Graduate of Dartmouth College, 1873; Bangor Theological Seminary, 1879. Since leaving Sturbridge he has held pastorates of Congregational Churches in Upton and Uxbridge, Mass.

AUGUSTUS M. RICE:

Born in Granby, N. Y.; reared in Minnesota and served one year in Union Army in cavalry regiment from that State. Graduated, University of Wisconsin, 1870; Chicago Theological Seminary, 1873. Mr. Rice came to Sturbridge from the pastorate of the Congregational Church in Royalston, and is now pastor of the Congregational Church in Dunstable, Mass.

Of these later pastors, Mr. Beaizley died, a few years ago. It is a gratification to us all that both Mr. Wiswall and Mr. Rice have found it possible to accept the invitation to take part in this service which means so much for the people among whom they once labored.

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

Beneath the murmuring pines in the burying-ground yonder for scores of years have rested from their labors the first three pastors of this Church. Standing as a boy before their quaint and crumbling headstones, my imagination used to picture them as grave and venerable leaders of a staid and sober flock. But the record reveals them in a different light. As Caleb Rice was the first, so he was also the youngest of the pastors of this Church. He signed the covenant as one of the fourteen original members of the Church in "New Medfield" at the age of twenty-four,—a young man with young men; for it should be remembered that this frontier community was settled mainly by the children of the Proprietors and by other youthful pioneers who had pushed forward to this remote hamlet to grow up with the country. The average age at which the first four pastors began their service here was twenty-seven years.

Yet their youth did not make them disposed to be lax in matters of Church discipline. Applicants for membership in the Church were required to make a statement to the whole Church of as much of their Christian experience as they deemed proper, or to give the Church satisfaction in some other way. The Church chest contains scores of these so-called "Experimental Relations," belonging to the second pastorate. They show an anguished searching of heart

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### JOHN C. HALL:

Born in Washington, Me., 1859. Graduated from Bowdoin College, 1885; from Bangor Theological Seminary, 1889; graduate student, 1889-90. Mr. Hall was pastor of the Congregational Church in Sutton, Mass., 1891 to 1902. His service in Sturbridge began in the summer of 1902.

which some of us to-day might call deplorably morbid introspection. Some of these ancient "relations" cannot fail to make a profound impression upon the reader, for they show strong personalities grappling with life's deepest problems. But it must be confessed that in many of them the similarity of arrangement and identity of phrasing arouse the suspicion that in making their statement before the Church these would-be members were virtually adopting as their own what had become a pretty thoroughly conventionalized "experience." It is probable that many of these statements which show similarity were written in conference with the pastor, if not by his own hand.

#### EXPERIMENTAL RELATIONS.

A. L., Read Dec. 16, 1761.

"I haue grate reson for to bless God that I was borne in Land of gospell lite and was fauered with a good educasion and besides that many coles (calls?) of deuine prouidence and at times was under conuictions but my euell hart and an inticing world semed to make all proue in a feettuall but after a concidrabell time I was under stronger conuict tions and after a conciderbell time I immagened that I receiued sum comfort but after sum time my fears ware beyond all my hoops and vuing my selfe in a very misirabell condision these wordse came to my minde why are thou cast doune o my sole and why art thou disquiattted within me hoop thu in God for thou shalt yet prase him and heare upon I took grate incoreaement and suposed my mounting stood strong for concedrabell time but after sum time prouidence cast a book in my hand titeled Cases of conshanc and wreding hou far a person mite goo by natrull conuiction I thare upon thought that was my very case and all was counterfit and no hoops no promis for me I all most in despare but blesed be god who hath all pouer in his own hande so ordered that a book was cast into my hand titeled Looking to Christ by fath and reading there in found this grate promis Ezekel 36 : 26, 27 A nu harte also will giue you and a nu sperit will I put with in you and I will take away the stony hart out of your flesh and I will poot my sperit with in you and heare upon I took incorigement and hearing a sarmon preched from the 50 of Isaiah 10 who is among you that feareth the Lord that obayeth the voise of his-sarvant that walketh in darkness and hath no lite let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his god and hear upon I tuck forder incorigement and hearing a sarmon preached Luke 19 : 17 come for all things are now ready and heare uppon I trust I am coled uppon by the sperit of god he sayed this du in rembrenc of me.

trusting and believing that the Spirit of the Bride Say Come I Do in the fear and Presence of God offer myself to full Communion with this Church of Jesus, asking your Charitable Reception of me and Prayers for me, that I may be Deliuered and kept from all Sin and walk as a worthy Member of the Mistical Body of + and that when I have Eat and Drink in his Presince I may not be Disowned by him. A. L."

M. H.

"I desier to bless god that I was born in the land of lite and liuead under the preaching of the gospel all my days and that I descended of shuch Parence that gave me up to god in baptism in my infaney but I have rebeld against god and my parence

in living in all most all manner of Sin in Sabath braking and Company Keeping and in disabaying my parnee good Counsel and in Structions that they gaue me in telling of me it was my duty to Seek to god in prayer and Keep his commands thay told me that I must renew my baptismal covenant I being young thought it time Enough but it has pleased all mytey god to a waking me [by the pourful preaching of a samon by the re mr haven hosea 10 and 12 and maney outhers that I haue hard; and it Came to mind] for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself not discerning the lords body; which was a discouragement to me and then a nother place came into my mind which is incouraging Isaiah 55 and 1 and I hop dont a low my self in the omission of aney none duty nor in the commision of any none Sin and I desire your prayers for me and your axceptance of me that I may walk according to the Professon that I haue maid.

M. H."

Another "Relation," in the same handwriting, is signed "The wife of M. H." It is a literal copy of the above, except for the part included in the brackets. The woman's "Relation" reads: "it has pleased all mytey god to a waking me by thunder many a time which is terrifying to me and puts me in mind of my duty; but I have been afraid if I should offer myself to come to the table of the Lord that I should come unworthily, for he that . . .," as in the above.

B. H.

"I desire to bles god that i was born in a land of gospel light and that i was early didicated unto god in the ordinance of baptizem and for many instructions and warnings from my parents yet haue Shamfully neglected my duty til of late i was brought to reconsider of my ways and was thoughtfull about my futer estate whereupon i heard a Sermon from these Words and ye will not come to me that ye might haue life which lay upon my mind much whareas i Saw that i neuer had been Willing to be Saued from my Sins but only in my Sins about this time i laboured under Sum temtasions and douts whether or no i had not cummitted the unpardonable Sin and the like whereupon these words came to my mind why art thou being the Kings Son lean from day to day wilt thou not tell me which afforded me Sum incuragement and also a reproofe then i began to Sit up great resolutions for a while but then i found Strength began to fail and as i thought the Spirit of god had withdrawn and that which i had greatly feared was now come upon me the view i had of eternity was dreadfull all hope faild and none could i blame but my Selfe for god apeared iust and where to go for releaf beter i cold not tel then to go to god who is mercifull as well as iust where upon douts and fears semed to uanish and i felt much reioyced but not continewng long heare i Sune fel into douts and fears and began to Scrupel all being afraid of Sum false hope and joy and So went douting for a concidrabel time yet not quite with out hope untill a more greater decouery of gods goodness and mearcey did apeare then all doutes and Sorows uanished away and those words in Samuel came to my mind So the woman went her way and did eat and her countenance was no more Sad but this i am confident in So far as i Know my own heart that i haue a greater desire and loue for the wais of god then formerly i had and i do acknoledg the many Sins and erars which i haue been gilted of and ask forgiveness of god and of this Church asking your prairs to god for me any do now ofer my Self to your comunion

B. H."

The following "Relation" is indorsed "this was read & voted into the Chh Sept. 11 : 1757," and is apparently in the handwriting of the pastor, Joshua Paine.

"I Desire to acknowledge the wonderfull compassion & Patience of God towards me that He hath Born so long with me, when I have done so much to Provoke Him to come out against me & cut me down as a Cumberer of the ground: I must acknowledge I have been too careless & negligent about the things of my peace which indeed should have been the most regarded by me: but tho' I have so greatly sinned against God, grieved His holy Spirit, so that God might Justly have left me to perish in my



sins; yet I trust He hath not left off striving with me nor left me to perish without hope; I hope God hath opened my eyes, and awakened me to see my sin & misery, bro't me to Consider my ways that have not been right in His sight. I have had loud Calls & warnings not only from Gods holy word, but by His providence, particularly in that dispensation of God's holy providence in the death of my Consort: in which Gods voice to me was be ye also ready; & tho' I with Him but a little before his death made a profession of Christ & his religion; & both joined together in giving up our Children to God in Baptism yet I am sensible that I ought not to stop there; but to come to the other ordinance even that of the Supper of the Lord; & which indeed was the advice & Council my Deceased Husband gave me when on his death bed giving me it in charge then not to neglect my duty in this respect: & lamented his neglect of duty in this particular, & determined had God spared his life & raised him up again to have come to His duty in this regard; Such Counsel & the dispensations of divine providence have been so sanctified & set home upon me, as I hope aright to stir me up to my duty; & accordingly I do now desire to join with this Chh; praying that God would freely pardon all my sins for Christs sake, & enable me to come aright, & asking your forgiveness of what you have seen amiss in me; & your prayers for me, that I might be a welcome guest & find acceptance with God thro' Christ.

S. H."

When Abigail———applied for membership, in the first year of Caleb Rice's ministry, the Church voted: "Considering the stories that have been about said Abigail——— we do think it proper to make searching inquiry thereto." A month later she was received into the Church, after having made open confession of gossiping and divers other indiscretions. But the exercise of discrimination as to the admission of members soon proved a less cause of anxiety to the Church than keeping watch over the walk and conversation of those already within the fold. Hardly a year had passed when the Church was given grave concern over the case of Lieut. Hezekiah———, who was charged with having "taken up Rum upon Cap<sup>t</sup> Marcy's account at Leicester," and with having "indulged in vain talk." Twice it was voted that "the church are not in charity with said ——, so as to communicate with him at the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper, till such time as the matter is set in a clearer light," and Parson Rice was instructed to correspond with ——'s former pastor in regard to it. Some time later, —— craved forgiveness, and the Church voted that "we are now satisfied therewith, and look upon him in a regular state," but soon they were forced to affirm anew that they were "not in charity with him."



During the first pastorates there were an appalling number of instances where the Church stopped after lecture to attend the confession of Brother A. and Sister B. for sins which almost exhaust the list of the Decalogue. The "Rules for the Regulation of this Church," adopted July 15, 1802, required that confession for "known, open, scandalous sins" and for absence from communion should be made before the Church only, "unless the offense be of so gross and public a nature that in the view of the majority of the Church present at a meeting on the subject it should appear more for the honor of the Chh and the interest of religion to have the confession more public, then in that case, it shall be made both before Chh and congregation."\* The most frequent

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#### \*CONFESSIONS AND DISCIPLINE.

"Whereas I the Subscriber have been left to be guilty of the breach of the Eighth Commandment whereby I have dishonoured God & Justly offended the people of God, I desire to be sorry therefor, & to ask forgiveness of God & all his people whom I have offended & pray that I may be enabled in all things to adorn the [illegible] of God our Saviour.  
U. W."

Indorsement: "Sep: 10: 1749 This was read to the Chh & voted to be Rec<sup>d</sup> as satisfactory & the Chh in charity with him &c."

"I acknowledge that I am naturally inclined to rebel against God, & that I am too apt to give way to Passion & to be overcome thereby: I have been left in my Passion to abuse Cap<sup>t</sup>. C. & as an aggravation of the matter it was in his own house, for which I am sorry & as I have asked his forgiveness for what has then been amiss in me, so I desire now to ask forgiveness of God & the charitable forgiveness of Gods people, & your prayers for me that I might be enabled to walk for the future more agreeable to the profession I make of the X<sup>n</sup> religion.

Sturbridge Octo 22 : 1753.

R. C.

this was read Octo<sup>r</sup> 27: 1753 & accepted by the Chh."

"Whereas we whose names are hereunto Subscribed have been left to fall into sin & have transgressed God's holy commands, we desire in a Suitable manner to be humbled before God & would take Shame to our selves for all our sins; more particularly we acknowledge we have been left to fall into the sin of fornication, a breach of the 7th Command whereby we have greatly dishonoured God, have Justly provoked him, & given Just occasion of offence to the Chh & people of God:

We hope God has in some good measure shewn us the evil of our ways & doings; we desire to ask forgiveness of God for Christs sake for all our sins more particularly the breach of the 7<sup>th</sup> Command we desire the Charitable forgiveness of the Church & people of God in this place & of all Gods people & that God would assist & enable us to behave our selves according to the rules of the gospel for the future.

D. C.

S. C.

this was read to the Chh & accepted March 17 : 1744 / 5."

offence was continued absence from church ordinances. This led to suspension; satisfactory excuses were required to be submitted in writing, or other evidence of contrition shown, otherwise it was declared that the erring member should be no longer "considered under the watch and care of this Church as a member thereof." In 1801 a considerable number of such delinquents were called upon for explanations. Some pleaded unworthiness; others, "perplexities in their minds"; one replied that her reasons "are of such nature that at present she does not choose to disclose them." A committee of the Church requested an interview with one absentee; when this was refused, they sought the brother out, but the only reason he then assigned for his absence from communion for more than a year was that "the meeting house had been repaired and altered against his will." This was not deemed satisfactory, and he was suspended from church privileges for the space of six months. In the first fifty years of this Church, a breach of the seventh commandment was the sin which a surprisingly large number of penitents confessed they "had been left to commit." In the first decades of the nineteenth century, drunkenness, which had caused an occasional lapse in the earlier years, became alarmingly prevalent. A deacon of the Church, after having been suspended and affectionately admonished, at the end of his

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"I whose Name is here unto Subscribed, Do humbly Acknowledge before God and his People my Manifold Sins in the agravated Nature thereof, and in Particular by Injuring the Charector of M<sup>rs</sup> R. by Saying that whereby it has been Reported that She has Infringed the 7<sup>th</sup> Command. whereby I Do acknoledge I have offended God and his People, and Do first and a bove all ask forgiveness of God, and M<sup>rs</sup>R. and this Chh. asking your Prayer to God for me that I may for the future Live more agreeable to my Profession and my whatch over my thoughts words and actions, and be an honour to Religion and this Chh.

D. W."

"To the Jentlemen Committe of the Church of Christ in Sturbridg,——Breatheren whare as I have Ben Called on to Shew Caws if any there Be why I have not attended the Communion for Some time past I answer that I have Ben Useed in a very un Christien Like Maner By Some of the membris of this Church therefore I have with Drawn my Self from them and Desire to Be Dismised from them.

Yours &C

Sturbridge September 12th 1798

O. M."

probation had to be excommunicated on the ground that he had exhibited no evidence of reform. Charges were sustained against Sister J. that "it was very apparent that she was disguised with the use of ardent spirit," and Sister C. was "so intoxicated with spirituous liquor that she was unable to walk or stand." There are present to-day members of this Church who heard from their mother's lips the story of a scene in the old meeting-house which those who witnessed it could never forget. An honored member of the Church had yielded to his besetting sin. He appeared before a Church meeting at the house of one of the members and—as the record reads—"made his concessions for the sin of intoxication which he had recently in a wicked and thoughtless manner committed. The brethren voted that they were satisfied with his concessions and that his acknowledgments be read before the congregation on next Sabbath." But he replied that his offense had been public and his confession should be no less public. There was a solemn hush in the meeting-house that Sunday morning, when this universally esteemed and beloved village doctor walked up the broad aisle, turned, faced the congregation and confessed his fault. Sins of slander and of Sabbath-breaking were confessed. Again and again quarrels between members were brought before the Church for adjustment, and in some cases appeal was made to councils in which churches in neighboring towns were represented by pastor and delegate,—as in the controversy arising in 1777, in which one of the complaints was that "Cap<sup>t</sup> P. Did Condemn S<sup>d</sup> C. (using a hard word) to be a Tory." The investigators declared it "not sufficiently Proved that P. Ever Used such a hard word as is Mentioned in the Complaint Calling S<sup>d</sup> Craft a Damned Tory," and the parties to the controversy were earnestly exhorted, in that time of public distress, to lay aside all contention and live as brothers.\*

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\*The tone of an eighteenth century Admonition may be indicated by the following extracts from a letter drafted by the second pastor of this Church. It is not dated.

These strange pages of our records have not been laid open here with the purpose of pointing the finger of scorn at the sins of our forebears. Their sins were those of their time and of a frontier community. Both by the young pastors and by the Church those sins were openly, vigorously and in large measure successfully combated. We affect to be amused or shocked by the weapons and methods of that godly warfare. In our day, drunkenness, stealing, and breach of the seventh commandment are not prevalent among church members as they were here in the first century of this Church. But it may well be questioned whether the twentieth-century church is waging more successful battle against the sins characteristic of its own day than did our grandsires. In the middle of the last century, by unanimous vote this Church declared that one of its members be "excommunicated from the Church and no longer be regarded or treated as a Christian," because he did not comply with the requirement of the Church that he confess before the whole congregation his "sins of Sabbath-breaking and the use of profane language." To-day these sins seem to be looked upon as venial,—indeed, rather difficult of definition. Church

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Letter of Admonition to E. A.

The Church of Christ in Sturbridge Sendeth to Mr. E. A. this Letter of Admonition.

We the Church of Christ in Sturbridge, acting for Christ, Do in the Name of the most glorious Lord our Saviour, whose Name you have Dishonoured by Serving against Him, Admonish you of and for these your Sins and in Perticular for

- 1 Your Unchristian Conduct towards your Brethren.
- 2 for your Pride and Self Sufficiency.
- 3 for your Varying from the Truth.
- 4 for your wicked and unchristian Reflection upon members of the Church of Christ in your Reasons for your Separation, wherein you Sugest and Say the Bread is Delt out to Dogs.
- 5 fifthly we admonish you for your unchristian and unscriptural Reflections upon the Chh of Christ.

O be wise to Resive this admonition that Comes from the Chh of Jesus Christ. Repent and be Reformed before it be too Late.

this from those that wish your Soul  
may Prosper and be in helth,  
Joshua Paine Pastor  
in the Name of the Church."

lists to-day are full of dead-wood,—members who never come to the Lord's table, and whose sole tribute to the faith they once professed consists in the payment of a few sordid dollars, which some one else must put to use. The besetting sins of church members to-day, as compared with those of a century ago, are less those of the body, more those of the mind and heart. Are they on that account less menacing, less difficult to root out? In the old days the watch and ward of this Church were a vital force, following the member in his wanderings far beyond the borders of this town and making searching inquiry into his standing and daily walk. Under the censure of the Church sinners showed forth works meet for repentance. From a deathbed here in Sturbridge came a pitiful plea that the offender might "be forgiven and restored to communion and fellowship that he might die in peace and in good standing with the Church." To-day many a church carries upon its roll the names of members who would greet the notice of their censure by the Church with a cynic's smile or with a yawn.

## THE CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN STURBRIDGE.

The first four pastors of this Church were "settled" by the Town, although during the third and fourth pastorates ministerial affairs were dealt with not at regular but at special town-meetings. Such a meeting, for example, was held in the early part of 1831, to which were summoned "the Inhabitants of the Parish and Congregational Society in the Town of Sturbridge qualified by law for the purposes of voting in the choice of parochial officers and other Parochial matters"; and the Town records show that the voters there provided for the pastor's salary and for painting "their meetinghouse." But a few months later, without any formality that has left a trace on the record, the town-meeting machinery was given up. In the dismissal of Mr. Bond and in the calling and



settling of Mr. Clark it was "the Society" which concurred with the Church. April 27, 1831,\* begin the "Records of the Congregational Society in Sturbridge." For nearly seventy years this was the organization which took charge of the financial or business side of church administration.†

Its organization underwent some change from time to time, and seems never to have been very systematically regulated. In 1834 the rule was adopted that "all persons who may wish hereafter to become members of said parish shall be recommended by the Prudential Committee thereof." Probably this was thought to savor too much of a close corporation, for half a dozen years later (April 20, 1840) it was voted that any person wishing to become a member of the Society might do it by applying to the Clerk. But ten years' experience led to the declaration that "the welfare and inter-

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\*A little later (September 7, 1835) the completeness of the separation is indicated by the Society's vote *not* to give their consent to have town-meetings held in their meeting-house, after the present alterations shall have been completed.

†But for a time the Commonwealth still stood back of the finances. There is still extant an order, given in the name of the Commonwealth, by the Assessors of the Congregational Society in Sturbridge to Benjamin Bullock, Collector of that Society, directing him to collect the sum of \$600. from persons named in the accompanying list, and authorizing him, in case any of those persons should refuse or neglect to pay on his demand, to distrain their goods or chattels, and sell the "distress" at public vendue, retaining the amount needed to meet the assessment charges. In the absence of any such goods upon which levy might be made, the Collector was authorized to "take the body of such person so refusing or neglecting, and him commit unto the Common Jail of the County aforesaid there to remain, until he pay the same or such part thereof as shall not be abated by the Assessors of said town for the time being, or by the County Commissioners for the County aforesaid.

"Given under our hands and seals by virtue of a vote of said Society passed on the twenty-eighth day of April last, this twenty-eighth day of October, 1831.

David Wight,	}	Assessors of said Society."
Erasmus Holbrook,		
Caleb Weld, Jr.		

Imprisonment for debt was not then obsolete. In April, 1828, a deacon of this Church was committed to jail for debt. His creditors, after some weeks, were persuaded to allow him to come out, upon payment of his board and other charges amounting to about \$50. This sum two members of the Church agreed to become responsible for, at the solicitation of the deacon's wife, on security of some household goods and promissory notes. A few weeks later, the deacon's wife left town in the middle of the night, taking, as was alleged, some of the pledged goods with her to New York State, where she thereafter lived. This episode gave rise to some difficult questions as to church discipline.



ests of this Society require a thorough reorganization of the same, so that the legal members of said Society may be known." January 14, 1852, the following "Preamble for By-Laws" was adopted: "Any person or persons who are not members of this Parish or Society may become such by signing their names to the following declaration:—'We the subscribers consent to become members of the Congregational Society in Sturbridge.'" On the page bearing this record and on a paper pasted at its end stand the names of 97 men who were members of the Society in 1852, or then or thereafter "consented" to become members. Doubtless such signature was sufficient to constitute legal liability, but it is singular that nothing on the records sets forth definitely the objects of the Society, nor was there any explicit statement on the part of the signer of his devotion to the ends of the organization or pledge of financial support for the Society of which he "consented" to become a member. It was a very loose organization, subject to sudden expansion or shrinkage, for, in accordance with the Constitution of Massachusetts, membership in such a body could be terminated at any time by the member's requesting the clerk to remove his name from the list. The unfortunate working of this arrangement was seen some forty years later, when eight members of the Society withdrew within two years of their having joined it, the debt meantime having reached very large proportions. The notes representing this debt were gradually taken up by the Church. In April, 1897, a new rule of membership was adopted: "Any person twenty-one years old may become a member of the Society by vote of the Society at any regularly called meeting and signing the By-Laws." The records do not indicate that any member was ever admitted under this rule, for, six months later, November 5, 1897, the Church became incorporated as the FIRST EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STURBRIDGE. The new corporation was empowered to hold real and personal property and promote every object for which the Congregational Society had served.

The Church having agreed as a corporate body to assume and pay all lawful debts of the Congregational Society and to meet all the obligations thereof forever, the final record reads: (September 5, 1898) "The First Congregational Society of Sturbridge this day transferred by deed, through their Committee, duly chosen and appointed for that purpose, all the real and personal property in their possession, with the records and papers, to the First Evangelical Congregational Church, and was, as per vote of the Society, thereupon disbanded and ceased to exist as a corporation."

Until the end of Mr. Bond's pastorate, money for the maintaining of public worship at the center meeting-house was raised by taxes assessed on the inhabitants belonging to that society. In 1831 their collection was "put up to the Lowest Bidder," and struck off at \$9. In the first year of Mr. Clark's pastorate, 1832, "the Society voted to try the experiment of raising money the present year by subscription, and the trouble of passing a subscription paper throughout the town be put up to the Lowest Bidder." It was struck off for \$4.50, and the ringing of the bell and care of the meetinghouse with sufficient wood for the stove went to the man who bid \$13.00. By 1851 a heavy debt had been incurred, which was raised by subscription. In that year a movement took form to secure the pews for the Society, by purchase or by gift, in order that their annual rental might yield the necessary revenue for parish expenses. A considerable number were given up, and in 1852 began the annual sale of choice of seats and their rental for a stipulated sum. In 1855, after much preliminary negotiation and the calling in of two disinterested committees of out-of-town men as appraisers of pews, the consent of the old pew-owners was secured, and alterations were made in the plan of seating which furnished "more and better seats than it supplied before." The former pew-owners were compensated by being given title to new "slips," and the additional pews were sold. Under

date of March 10, 1856, there is recorded an appraisal of each of the 75 pews, at rentals ranging from \$4.00 to \$47.50.\* It was arranged that a subsequent appraisal should be made by three disinterested men from out of town. In 1861 a debt which had reached nearly \$1900 was cleared off, the donors being shown informal assessments on their property, when asked to subscribe. In 1863 it was voted to raise the appraisal of the pews to \$1500. In 1879 it was determined to raise \$1300, to pay current expenses, by rental of slips and by weekly offerings. In 1893 the plan of raising money for current expenses by pledged weekly offerings was definitely adopted, and the following year it was voted that the sittings in the church be free.

In 1835 the meeting-house underwent a thorough modernizing, and the old-fashioned square pews were removed.† October 18, when the Church and congregation assembled for the first time after this transformation, the church "was dedicated anew to the service of God." In 1856 the interior of the meeting-house was remodeled by placing the pulpit at the East end and reversing the slips. Eight years later the church building was again somewhat remodeled, and turned a quarter way around, so that its front was made

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\*The pastor's record reads; "The Meeting House has been repaired and remodeled and the slips made Parish property and rented for the support of the Ministry." September, 1856.

†In a letter accompanying his donation toward the building of the new church, and dated on his eightieth birthday, (Sept. 26, 1909) Mr. C. H. Merrick of Ottumwa, Iowa, writes: "My memories of the departed Church reach back a little more than three-quarters of a century to the time when it had externally three entrance porches and internally the old-fashioned square pews with the spindle railings around their tops, although these memories are somewhat dim, for the modernizing of the Church was done I am quite certain before I was five years old.

"That modernizing, however, I remember very well, and how, during the summer when it was done, services were held at the old yellow Vestry, which was enlarged for the purpose by taking out its windows and building lean-tos on its sides supported by rough tree-trunks set in the ground and seated with plain planks, the backs to the seats having been omitted to economize space or money or possibly both.

"I remember, too, when the Church was well filled, the Walkers coming from the North, the Potters and Plimptons from the South, the Porters, Wheelocks and Stones from the East, and the Wights and Holbrooks from the West."

parallel with the main highway. In 1897 the old stoves were removed and a furnace installed. Six years later the "electrical rods" were removed from the building. In the summer of 1908 the "vestry" was moved from its former site, with the intention of joining it to the meeting-house at the north end and adapting it more fully to the social and religious service of the Church. But these alterations were never completed.\*

## WOMAN'S WORK IN THE CHURCH.

It is impossible to give statistics of membership for the whole period of this Church's life for the reason that the records of Mr. Paine's pastorate of nearly forty years have been lost. They are said to have been stolen from his house. Taking the record of admissions for the rest of the period from 1736 to 1910, they number 1250 of whom 411 have been males and 839 females.

It will be remembered that of the original fourteen members of the Church of Christ in New Medfield all were men.

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\*It is desirable that there should be placed on record a brief statement as to the other real estate which has been owned by this Church and Society.

The original grant of land to Caleb Rice was to him as an individual and not as a permanent holding of the pastor of this Church. Most of this land he sold within a few years. His successors bought or rented houses suited to their needs. Thus, Mr. Austin bought the house now occupied by Mr. R. W. Gifford, and for some years after his own resignation, he rented this house, which was known as the "parsonage," to at least one of his successors. Twenty years later it became difficult for the pastor to rent a conveniently located and comfortable house; for about a year Mr. Richardson had to rent a house in Snellville, a mile and a half from the church. Accordingly, March 30, 1868, the Society voted unanimously to buy a half-acre lot and build a house for a parsonage, and it was forthwith erected where it now stands. Fifteen years later, 1883, a barn was built for the parsonage, as a gift from Mr. Chester Walker.

The Rev. Mr. Bond was greatly interested in stimulating the young people of the community, and through his urging the "Vestry" was built to give an opportunity for social and literary gatherings, as well as for prayer-meetings and other week-day religious exercises. Several years after its erection, the land on which it stood was deeded (March 2, 1831) by Capt. Perez Walker to the deacons of the Church and their successors, for the uses of the Church; it was to revert to his heirs and assigns, when it ceased to be so used. For nearly four-score years the Vestry was the scene of some of the most earnest and fruitful activities of the Church. Then, in the summer of 1908, it was moved to the rear of the meeting-house, but before the proposed alterations were completed, both buildings were destroyed.

It was not the habit of the seventeenth century to accord much initiative in public affairs to the "weaker vessel." But the next year seven women were admitted and only two men, and from the fourth year of the life of this Church the men, as is true in most churches, have been in hopeless minority. In the early years the women doubtless did their full share of the genuinely religious work in this community, but their activities were for the most part in the background. They occupied separate galleries and sections in the meeting-house, and it was an occasion for "large debate" in town-meeting, when a dozen of them petitioned for permission to build a pew where they could see the minister. In the church records of the first hundred years, except for the lists of those admitted to the Church, and except also for their considerable proportion of the cases of discipline, there is hardly any mention of women.

There have been various women's associations connected with this Church, but most of them have been too informal, too modest, or too unsystematic to keep records of their doings. In 1812 there was formed the Sturbridge Female Society, which adopted a quite elaborate constitution, introduced by this preamble: "Impressed with a sense of the importance of Virtue & Religion & desirous of promoting them by every means in our power, we agree to unite together in a society, for purposes of religious improvement." Meetings were to be held the first Tuesday in every month for religious exercises and improvement. Each member was to contribute fifty cents a year for charitable and religious uses. It was stipulated: "Whatever shall be said or done, by any one in our Society shall not be made public." Beginning in 1812, there are 73 names signed to the constitution, the last apparently added in 1843, although there are records for two years later. The meetings were held regularly at the house of one of the members, who was paid two or three dollars a year for her trouble in supplying a work-room. The proceedings included prayer and reading from the Bible and from other



books of devotion, quite a library of which was gradually brought together by the Society, for use at the meetings and to be loaned to members. There are still extant scores of letters, written to be read at the meetings, by members who were obliged to be absent or who had moved out of town.\*

A committee was chosen each year to solicit donations, which were made not only in money but in labor, in wool, or in articles of clothing, etc. In 1829 it was voted: "That in consequence of having cloth badly manufactured that but two persons be employed in spinning our wool the present year and that they be paid for their services unless it be gratuitous." The following year the treasurer recorded: "Paid Mrs. Dunton seven yards of flannel for spinning and weaving our charity cloth." The disbursement of the

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\*These were intended to contribute to the religious improvement of the members. Most of them detail the writer's own searchings of heart, and record her gratitude for the help received from the Society's meetings. One gives details as to the hopeful conversion of a frivolous young woman in Brimfield. Several report on the state of religion in the towns to which they have removed. The letters are very long. Their flavor may be indicated by one or two extracts. The first is from a much valued member, who had made her home in Homer, N. Y.

(Jan. 15, 1827.)

"Dear Sisters in the Lord

Not all the flatteries of this vain world nor the kind attachments of surrounding friends can make me forgetful of the ties which bind my heart to my distant Sisters of Zion. Little did I think when I received your kind token of friendship it would alain so long unanswered but did you know the many changing senes and afflictions which I have ben caled to pass you would not wonder and I presume you would excuse me if you knew what a task it is for me to write but I must be short for I have to take the midnight hours while my family are through the goodness of a devine protector in health and silent slumber. I was in hopes to have had time to a given you a full account of the out pourings of the holy spiret here among us the year past but I have not learnt the correct number that has been hopefully converted in all our Churches but proverble you will have the account in your panoplists [This was doubtless the "Panoplist, or the Christian's Armory," "Conducted by an Association of the Friends of Evangelical Truth," Boston.] this month, and as I expect you will receive these imperfect lines by the hand of Brother J G if his life should be spaired to arrive at Sturbridge, dear Sister Plimpton he will tell you more about our situations as it respect our religeous societies in twenty menits than I can write in an hour. . . ."

I must close with wishing you all the prosperity both in spirituale and temperal affairs that this imperfect world can afford in hast please to answer this by Brother J if convenient if not as soon as you can from your unworthy Sister in the Lord P Goodell

I think if nothing happens I shall write again before long

To the Sisters of the female Society."



Society's donations was determined by vote at the annual meeting.\* Occasionally special aid was given to some needy person in town. At the very first annual meeting, it was voted that "two dollars thirteen cents be given for the support of the Bass Viol." Considerable contributions were made to different organizations to constitute the pastor a life member of them. But this Society of godly women specialized on aiding young men in their preparation for the ministry. Sometimes it was a Sturbridge youth who was thus favored. For quite a series of years the principal record was: "Voted: To cloathe David T. Lane [son of the pastor,

"To the Ladies of the Female Society in Sturbridge. Sturbridge, Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> 1813.

Dear Sisters,

Feeling impressed with a sence of the awful realities of etarnity I take this opportunity to address you with a short Epistle on the Subject. For a moment let us cast our eyes on the ravages of time and consider how swiftly one after another passes away no age nor order is exempt from this bold ravager call,d death wherever and whenever it has has its commission it preys on the body without a moments delay, how oft have we seen bereaved companions sinking under a load of grief resigning up the partner of their youth and their dependance in, Old age, no bribe of gold, or appendage of honour, or the tear of grief, or the prayer of the Soul, can save from this predetermined hour; how apt are we to promis or rather figure long life for a healthy child, we are apt to forget the emphatical word thou shalt surely dye; when we see the form, plump, the cheek rosy, the mental powers quick, and activ, the bodily organs performing with ease their function, we are ready to forget mortality and delight ourselves with this mortal corruptable worm, which is as the flower which passes away, not suspecting the fallacy of our hopes or discovering the rottenness of our structure untill by some blast of sickness it falls motionless and inactive, never more to rise untill it shall be awaked by the mighty sounding trumpet of the archange, which shall awake all nations from their cold beds to the general judgment of the most high God; . . . . [After portraying the contrast between the resurrection of the redeemed and of the lost, and exhorting the sisters to watchfulness and prayer, she concludes:] "And may that God who hears prayers have mercy on each member of this society and crown them with that spiritual good which is life eternal Patty Johnson.

Pleas to excuse the liberty I have taken in writing with the length of this Epistle and errours in writing and shoul be glad to receive a letter from each or any of you."

\*Payments in 1824.

" Carding wool	.74
Weaving	1.80
Dressing 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ of cloth	3.03
Making pantaloons	00.58
Coat trimmings	00.83
One pair of fine shirts	2.53
One pair of Shoes	2.00
W. Bullock in part for making coat	2.00

\$13.51

Payments in 1826.

Making pantaloons	.50
Carding wool	1.48
Flag handkerchief	.92
Pantaloons	1.08

from whom the Society received appreciative letters of acknowledgement] and assist him as we are able." In 1828 it was voted "that David T. Lane have all the Cloth that he needs, let it be more or less, and the remainder be sent to the Education Society." This was "The American Society for Educating Pious Youth for the Gospel Ministry," which that year sent to this Sturbridge band of women its receipt for "One Piece Flannel of 21 yds, worth \$10.50 as a Donation." Four years later the gift was more varied. The treasurer's record shows that donations of wool had been received from a dozen different persons, amounting in all to 22½ pounds. It continues:

"Made thirty-two yards of flannel and paid Miss Fay for weaving thirty-two yards .75

paid Mrs. Johnson for weaving twenty yards of flannel, the wool for this last web was collected in 1831. 1.60

This fifty-two yards of flannel and a Box of Clothing containing the following articles was sent to A. Education Society. 2 Bed Quilts 2 pr Sheets 7 pr Pillow Cases, 9 pr Stockings, 3 Shirts, 6 Collars & 1 Towel, and Twelve Dollars. Received receipt."

In 1833 Mr. Clark mentions as one of the events of the year that a "Young Ladies' Reading Society had been formed with very flattering prospects." For many decades the Ladies' Benevolent Society has pursued its varied and useful labors. In the early days their pious fingers sewed for young men preparing for the ministry in Massachusetts academies and colleges. Much has been accomplished by them for the help of those in need in our own community.\*

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\*A most interesting and cheering instance of bread, cast upon the waters, returning after many days, has just been seen. Year after year, the women of this Church have knit and sewed and given money that the little children in the "parish," so to say, of our good friend, Miss Remington, (the "Remington" settlement, Buffalo, N. Y.) might share in the joy of Christmas. And now when we have been trying to build again our Church home, little Italian children in Buffalo, by their grateful contributions of a few pennies apiece, have made a substantial donation to this Church,—a gift which must help to hallow these walls.

Mention should also be made of the fact that the women of this Society have proved excellent financiers. Again and again the proceeds of their sales and suppers have cleared off deficits, or provided needed repairs or improvements; they procured the first pipe organ and their treasury has contributed a liberal sum to the cost of building this Church.

For a century, though zealous in all good works, the women seem to have obeyed the Pauline injunction as to their demeanor and part in public meetings. In 1832 there is one record that looks far ahead: the Church was about to ballot for the election of a deacon, when the motion was carried that "The Sisters of this Chh. be requested to vote." I find no other indication of their voting or being asked to vote until 1876, when the question formally arose whether the By-Laws should be so altered as to "give the Female members the right to vote in all Church matters." This additional By-Law was then adopted: "All Members of the Church of the age of eighteen years and upwards, in good and regular standing, shall be entitled to vote, on all business that comes before the Church." Fifteen years later, (September 5, 1891) it was voted to add two women to the Church Committee, and their representation in the management of the Church's most important interests is now fully assured.

### MISSIONARY INTERESTS AND ENDEAVOR.

This Church has not been unmindful of its duty to bear its part in missionary effort. As early as 1808 it voted to join as a body the Evangelical Missionary Society of Worcester County, and to contribute \$10 to its objects. Twenty years later the Church became auxiliary to the Society for Mutual Assistance of the Churches, and for years this work was included among the objects to be supported by the contribution taken at the Lord's table. The proceeds of this collection also covered the cost of the communion bread and wine, the lighting and heating of the Vestry, and the "aiding

of the poor of the Church. A gleam of worldly wisdom (or a hint of some discouraging experience) is found in the vote of 1835 that a previous resolution of the Church to "support its own poor" be so modified as to limit its application to those who have their legal settlement in the town of Sturbridge"; a few years later the vote to support the Church poor was reconsidered and rescinded, thus making poor-relief distinctly a secular charge.

From time to time the Church contributed considerable sums to various educational institutions; thus, in 1834 about \$40 was given to "the College in West Tennessee," and \$50 was appropriated to assist young men of this town pursuing their studies in Monson Academy." For a number of years a most modern method was employed in administering our missionary benevolences: this Church voted that the \$100 appropriated by them for the use of the Home Missionary Society be applied to the support of the Rev. Benj. C. Cressey as this Church's Missionary at the town of Salem, Indiana. Letters from this frontier worker were read here, and he is repeatedly referred to in the records as "the Missionary of this Church in Indiana."

This Church felt the evangelizing impulse which led to the forming of the "American Board." During the pastorate of Mr. Bond, the Female Charitable Society was reorganized as the Ladies' Society, and a Men's Association was also formed, the prime object of each being to develop interest in and support of foreign missions. The movement met with a surprising degree of success. Gradually foreign missions became the most appealing object of benevolence, gaining while donations to other causes nearer at home were dwindling. This Church made its largest contributions to benevolent objects during Mr. Clark's ministry. In 1837, —the year of the great financial panic—while the Home Missionary Society was given only \$69.25 in place of the customary \$100, out of a total of about \$610 devoted to benevolences there was contributed to the American Board

\$323.03. And this was the very year in which the Church reconsidered and rescinded its earlier vote to support the Church poor.

### CHURCH MUSIC.

In the early days, both Church and Town recognized it as a duty to promote singing. Their activities in this regard overlapped each other. At the third meeting of the Church of Christ in New Medfield (March 17, 1737), it was voted that Moses Allen "Set the Psalm in the Congregation upon the Sabbath day." What the substance of their tuneful lays should be, was determined in 1765, when the question in the warrant for the Church meeting "Whether we shall sing any other portion of the Psalms than we now sing, and if so whether tate and brady's with the Appendix of Hymns or Watts version of the psalms" was decided in favor of the former. In 1768 an article in the warrant for the town-meeting was to "See if the Town will grant the Petition of Sundry of the Inhabitants of the Town requesting they may have the Liberty of takeing their seats in the Meeting House in the front Gallery, or whare the Town Shall think proper, in order to carry on the Deuty of Singing with more regularity decency and good order." Permission was granted them to take their seats in the front gallery "for the better Carrying on Singing . . . Dureing the Town's Pleasure." Ten years later (November 18, 1778) a town-meeting warrant reads: "& whereas an uneasiness Subsists among a number of the Inhabitants of this Town in Regard to Singing in Public Worship on Sabbath Days, therefore: To See if the town will Enquire into the Causes of Said uneasiness, & pass such vote or votes as they in their wisdom may think most likely to unite the minds of the People in that part of Public Worship." But "after some debate," it was voted not to act upon this knotty subject. The Church, however, was not deterred from acting upon the matter, and a committee was appointed which after several weeks of investigation



brought in a report setting forth clearly the differences which had arisen between the Singers who aspired to sing "by Rule" and conservatives of the congregation who wished to continue to make melody unto the Lord, each after his own fashion. The records of the Church for that period are lost, so that it is not known what action was taken upon this report, but its admirable spirit must have helped greatly to relieve the strained situation.\*

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\*REPORT OF A COMMITTEE IN REGARD TO SINGING.

To the Rev<sup>d</sup> Joshua Paine,

To be Communicated to the Church.

Whereas there has been some very unhappy matters of Difficulty & uneasiness in the minds of Some in this Town, with respect to Singing in the Worship of God in our Christian Assembly, since the late Indeavours of Learning to Sing by Rule: The Church Did at a meeting on the 15th of July last, being Deeply Impres<sup>d</sup> with a Sence of our unhappy Scituation with respect to Singing, it being more affecting considering the sore Distress & Calamity wee are under in this Land: The Church being Desierous of Removing said Difficulties, cementing Differences, Restoring Peace & Proposing some Plan, whereby wee might Carry on that part of Public Worship in Love & Harmony according to the Rules of good Order & Edification: the Church Chose us, the Subscribers, a Committee for that Purpose:—

Your Committee have taken into their Serious Consideration what appears to them to bee the Principle matters of Complaint & uneasiness Since the late attempt of a Reformation of Singing by Rule: on the one hand made by the Singers and on the other, by those offended by the conduct of the Singers in some Respects & other matters that have attended Singing; In the first place we Look upon it Necessary & of Importance; that good & Necessary Rules. for the Singing of Psalm Tunes be Learned & observed, & as a Likely means for this Purpose We Introduce the Noble Exhortation given by our Godly Forefathers, Rev<sup>d</sup> Ministers of the Gospel, more than 58 years ago, in their Preface to Mr. Walters Singing Book as follows: And we would encourage all, more particularly our Young People, to accomplish themselves with Skill to Sing the Songs of the Lord, according to the good Rules of Psalmody: Hoping that the Consequences of it will be, that not only the Assemblies of Zion will Decently & in order, Carry on this Exercise of Piety, but also it will be the more introduced into private Families, & become a part of our Family Sacrifice. At the same time we would, above all, exhort, That the main Concern of all may be, to make it not a meer Bodily Exercise but Sing with Grace in their Hearts, & with Minds attentive to the Truth in the Psalms which they Sing, & affected with them; so that in their Hearts they may make a Melody to the Lord. Signed by the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>rs</sup> Increase Mather Cotton Mather Nehemiah Walter, & others 15 in all.

& now as to the Difficulties & Discouragements the Singers have Laboured under since their vigorous Exertions of Learning to Sing by Rule often mentioned by them, as their not being Properly Encouraged, & so many being opposed to Singing by Rule some People's leaving the Meeting House &c., as to Encouraging Singing we hope matters of Discouragement that are really such will soon be removed; if any their be who oppose Singing by Rule or Look upon it not necessary we hope they will weigh that matter in their own minds without Prejudice. Read Said Mr. Walters Reasons & Directtions, on that Subject, & whither or no it is even Possable that a Congregation



In 1793 the town voted to "appropriate to the use of the Singers the South East Square in the Gallery of the Center Meeting house." At about the same time a grant of £3

Should Join together in Singing & Carry it on in order, no one Knowing any Rule & so none could observe any; we trust this will Satisfy them.

another thing mentioned by the Singers is their Persons & Characters being Injuriously Treated; as to this wee know not the Persons nor the Perticular Circumstances that have attended their offenses: wee hope those Persons will Seriously reflect on their Conduct & See the Importance of their Paying a Sollem regard to that golden Rule (of Doing to others as they would have others do to them)

a nother matter of Discouragement mentioned by the Singers is their not having Liberty to Sing once a Day without Reading line by line &c as to this, the Singers as Individuals have a Right of Private Judgment. they to gather think that is best, the Church has the same Right. wee must strive to Enlighten each other, & hope we shall be lead to do right. Nothing is more common than opposition & Discouragement in a good work.

With respect to the matters of uneasiness in the minds of some Relative to the Proceedings of the Singers in some respects Since the late Indeavours of Learning to Sing by Rule in our Congregation in the first place the Singers Ariseing to To Set the Psalm or Strike the Tune when the Quethiser or Quethisers, who were orderly Introduced to do that Duty being Present attempting to do their Duty were Interrupted, & this of the Singers was not as wee Suppose don on a Sudden by Supprise, but by before Determination: further their proceeding to Sing without reading line by line, no previous notice being given to those whose whose Duty it was to read, & haveing no vote of the Church passed to Sing without Reading.

In this we Sincerely think many of the Singers are to Blame, Did not Proceed according to the Rules of Decency & good order; by which they have brought a Blemish on the good work they were Engaged in, for which they have good Reason to reflect upon them selves wee hope they will do honour to them selves & the Cause of God: by making Sutable Confession herefor. further it is our Real oppinion that their Introducing of Some New Tunes & Especially Omitting Some Old Tunes: whereby Some who were Desirous of joining in Singing were Deprived of the Privilidge: was not for the Peace & Edification of our Church & Congregation.

Upon the whole your Committe is Sencible there has been blame on both Sides. wee would by no means Discourage what is good & Praise worthy in our Children & young People in Learning good Arts Rules &c; & in Promoting Psalmody. Wee hope none will. they observing the Rules of good order & Edification; any Conduct to the contray wee look upon it to be our Duty to appear against. wee hope that wherein any have Injured the Persons or Characters of the Singers or hendered them in Promoting any good work, will be Sencible thereof. wee hope we shall all be Inabled to Look at Home in this time of Trouble & Difficuly: to Know our own Duty & do it. to seek after the things that make for Peac & wherby we may Edify one another.

as to futer Proceeding in Carrying on Singing in Public Worship wee are Sencible that those that Lead need wisdom to Direct them: & that they will make use of Such Tunes as will be for the Peace & Edification of our Assembly in General.—& further that Psalms be Sung once on the Sabbath Days at the Concluding of the Divine Servis, by Reading one verse or half stave at once, for the Space of four months next.

Sturbridge August the 21<sup>st</sup>, 1779

John Morse,	}	Committee.
Joshua Harding }		
Ralph Wheelock }		

was made "to Encourage the Revival of Singing in this town"; this was devoted to maintaining a singing school under the direction of the selectmen. Five years later the town voted its approval of a contribution to be taken in church on Thanksgiving day by four specified persons, the proceeds to be placed in the hands of the selectmen to be delivered to "the Society of Singers when they Shall be under the necessary Regulations to receive the same." In 1802 a committee which had been appointed to lay before the town some method for encouraging singing reported: "That the singers are Obligated to spend much time to acquire the art so as to perform that part of public worship decently, & to be at the expence of Books it is but reasonable that the town should grant them the encouragement of paying the master, & as there appears to be a number of Excellent voices that only want Cultivating we recommend that the town grant \$60 to be laid out for that purpose to be assessed on the whole town & that the new parish draw in proportion to what they pay." This recommendation was adopted. The following year the Church requested the singers to nominate such persons or persons as they "think most suitable for the service of conducting the singing in public worship" and at a later meeting proceeded to elect the four persons so named "to stand as choristers in the order as they are nominated, and also that the Chh. signify to the singing Society their respects for their past services, and wishes for the further continuance of said services in that important branch of social worship."

In the first half of the nineteenth century the east end of the gallery was made into seats for the singers, who seem to have been accompanied by a goodly orchestra, including violins, a flute, a clarionet, a bass viol and a double bass. Judging from the treasurer's report, their performances for the year 1842 were the most strenuous, for then the charge "For bass viol Strings" mounted to \$4.50. In 1840 the practice was begun of raising \$50 by subscription to com-





THE "OLD CENTER MEETING HOUSE." Built 1784-1789.  
Its Site, after the Fire of August 5, 1908.

pensate "the leader of the Singers"; later, appropriations were made for this purpose among the regular parish expenses. For many years this service was rendered by Charles Fuller. About 1860 an innovation was introduced in the shape of a melodeon, soon replaced by a heavier one. The first player upon the new-fangled instrument was Theodore Snell, and for three score years from that day to the present the musical Snell family has been a chief dependence in this part of the service of the Church. When a pipe organ was installed in 1876, mainly through the efforts of the Ladies' Benevolent Society, it was erected in the alcove at the rear of the south gallery, opposite the pulpit. Until 1902 the congregation accorded recognition of the singers' efforts by rising, during the second hymn, turning their backs upon the preacher and facing the choir.

## THE BUILDING OF THE NEW CHURCH.

Between twelve and one o'clock on the morning of August 5, 1908, during a furious storm, lightning struck the steeple of the old meeting-house and set it on fire. The bell-rope was burned off almost immediately so that the bell could not sound the alarm. The scenes of that night will never be forgotten by those who witnessed them. The fury of the storm, the high-leaping flames, the crash of timbers, the fall of the bell were dramatic, indeed; but that was no place for idle spectators. Willing helpers did all that man could do to rescue every thing that could be removed, and to save the Town Hall and Library, both of which were badly scorched by the fierce heat. In a few hours there remained above the ground hardly a vestige of that noble old meeting-house where four generations of Sturbridge folk had been wont to gather for worship.

In the gloom of the morning after the fire, the first word of cheer was a letter of sympathy from a committee of the Unitarian Society, cordially offering the use of their church



building at any time we might wish to use it. That warm-hearted invitation and its acceptance are both spread upon the records of our Church. The grace of Christian hospitality shown by our sister Society, in these months when we have been homeless, will long be held in grateful remembrance.

The burning of the old meeting-house was a crushing blow to this Church. The future looked dark. To rebuild seemed a hopeless task. Weighty arguments were advanced against the expediency of building a new church in a community like this. And yet, there was gradually deepening the feeling that we must have a house of worship of our own,—that, however hospitable one's host may be, in church as in private relations, there is no place like home. On the fourteenth of October, 1908, after much anxious debating, it was voted "that we proceed to build a church," and committees were chosen to solicit funds and to consult and report to the Church plans and costs of a suitable building. June 7, 1909, Mr. George H. Clemence was chosen architect, and August 30, Mr. Orrin J. Aldrich's bid for the building contract was accepted. Friends of the old Sturbridge Church have given liberally of money and of service. Money contributions have been received from more than one hundred donors, ranging in amount from one dollar to two thousand dollars. Many, both within and without our church household, have made specific gifts which will add much to the new building's serviceableness. Thus it is due to the generous public spirit of one of our citizens that the clear and cheering tones of the old Revere bell are once more heard, and the tower clock will be a boon to all within sight or hearing of this place.\*

To-day, we see here the result of all this striving. It has meant much of devotion, of hard work, of sacrifice. To what end? Sentiment aside, this church family is far more

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\*The old bell, which had been badly cracked in the fire, was recast by the gift of Mr. Alvin B. Chamberlain. It was erected by Mr. Henry D. Haynes, on a day long to be remembered by the children of the Centre Schools, for their hands "manned the rope" which raised the bell to the belfry. The tower clock was the gift of Mr. Melvin Shepard. The chancel windows and choir screen were given by Mrs. Ellen Hill Fisher; the west window, by Mr. Alvin Morse; the platform furnishings, by Mr. F. L. Chapin

comfortably housed in this snug, convenient building than ever before. But the love and loyalty which have built this church have not been put forth primarily to enable this church family to "sit at ease in Zion." The building of a new church was a mistake,—a waste of money and of energy sorely needed in other lines of Christian work,—*unless* this new meeting-house shall be made to minister to nobler Christian living on the part of those who worship here and to a more intelligent, a more generous service of the community.

Less than twenty years ago there was still much talk of the doleful present and the yet more doleful future of the hill town in Massachusetts. Sturbridge and this Church have felt heavy discouragements. The town's population dwindled and its elements shifted,—changes which were pitifully reflected in the lonesome handful of a congregation in the huge old meeting-house which sixty years ago used to be thronged by worshippers from the four corners of the town. But the day for pessimism in Sturbridge is past. In many ways life here has become far more comfortable and attractive than it was twenty or even ten years ago. The change is typified by this very building, in the convenience and completeness of its appointments in contrast with the bare and austere old meeting-house we all loved. The physical facilities for the public worship and social activities of the Church are vastly better here to-day than ever before. What of the will? What of the spirit? The watchword of the new day is co-operation. Close-grouped about our beautiful Sturbridge Common are our Library, our Town Hall, and two Christian Churches. What may it not mean for the future of this community, if the forces for good for which these stand, are raised to their highest efficiency by cordial co-operation! For you, who make this new meeting-house your church home, in this struggle for the higher life in Sturbridge the question is, are you eager to lend a hand? Are you ready, not to shrink from the problem, but rather to rise to the opportunity, of the Church in the country town.

## APPENDIX A.

### LEGACIES AND MEMORIAL GIFTS.

Aside from the donations connected with the building of the new meeting-house, this Church, in the long years of its history, has received many gifts of money, of church furnishings, and of service, which have borne witness to the filial devotion of sons and daughters of this Church, or of those whose forefathers worshipped here. Mention should be made of the following legacies and memorial gifts. The dates are given the years in which the funds became available.

- 1844. Mrs. Sarah Harding made this Church her residuary legatee. The legacy amounted to about \$250. A part of this sum was used to repair the Vestry, and the rest to pay debts of the Society.
- 1864. Mrs. Ebenezer Howard's gift of \$100 was used for putting blinds upon the Vestry.
- 1886. James B. Bullock, Esq., of New York City, bequeathed without restriction the sum of \$5,000 to this Church, "where his dear parents worshipped for so many years."
- 1890. A gift of \$1000 was received "in memory of deceased parents, who were earnest workers in and for the Church." "The interest only of this sum is to be drawn and used for the support of the gospel in said Church." It was the donor's special request that it should be credited to "a native of the town, though a non-resident."
- 1891. Miss Sarah M. Wight bequeathed \$250 to this Church. At the discretion of her executors it was expended for the painting of the meetinghouse.
- 1902. Emerson Wight's bequest of \$2000 became available. The interest only is to be used for the support of the Church.
- 1909. William Wight bequeathed the sum of \$500 to constitute the "William Wight Fund," the interest of which is to be used for the benefit of this Church.

## APPENDIX B.

### DEACONS.

The following is a list of those who have held the office of Deacon since the organization of this Church. The dates indicate the years when they began their service. The loss of the book containing the records of Mr. Paine's pastorate makes it impossible to assign dates in the case of Deacons who were chosen during that period. The longest service was that of Deacon Henry Haynes, from his election in 1853 to his death in 1899.

1736, Daniel Fiske	1832, James Chapin
1736, Ebenezer Stearns	1846, Perley Allen
1741, Isaac Newell	1850, David K. Porter
1747, Joshua Baker	1853, Melville Snell
1749, Edward Foster	1853, Henry Haynes
1764, Moses Weld	1863, Charles Fuller
Joshua Harding	1863, Henry E. Hitchcock
Job Hamant	1869, Isaac Johnson
Roland Clark	1886, William G. Reed
Eleazar Hebard	1894, Lucius Snell
1807, Joel Plimpton	1899, John F. Hebard
1808, Daniel Plimpton	1900, Henry D. Haynes
1822, Ephraim Lyon	1902, Charles W. Bradford
1826, Zenas Dunton	1904, Benjamin C. Weld
1826, George Davis	

## APPENDIX C.

### PROGRAMME OF THE DEDICATION OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS.

Wednesday, the Eleventh of May, Nineteen Hundred and Ten,  
at Half after Two in the Afternoon.

#### ORDER OF SERVICES.

ORGAN PRELUDE.—“Pilgrim Chorus” . . . . . *Wagner*  
MISS VIOLA G. PACKARD

CALL TO WORSHIP.

THE PASTOR

Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion: and unto thee  
shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer,  
unto thee shall all flesh come. O worship the Lord in the  
beauty of holiness. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving  
and into his courts with praise.

DOXOLOGY.

THE CONGREGATION

INVOCATION.

THE REV. ALEXANDER WISWALL

QUARTET.—“Festival Te Deum” . . . . . *Buck*

RESPONSIVE READING.—Selection No. 4

THE REV. JOHN C. HALL

TRIO.—“The Lord will comfort Zion” . . . . . *Brown*

SERMON.

THE REV. JOSEPH B. CLARK, D. D.

QUARTET.—“I shall be satisfied” . . . . . *Brown*

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

PROF. GEORGE H. HAYNES



THE CONGREGATION

CEREMONY OF DEDICATION.

*(The People standing and responding to the Minister.)*

Being prospered by the good hand of the Lord our God to finish the work, which in His providence we were called upon to perform,

*We do now, with gratitude and joy, solemnly consecrate this church.*

To the everlasting God, our heavenly Father; in whom we live and move and have our being; from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; and who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem mankind;

To Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour, who has promised to be with us alway, even unto the end of the world;

To the praise of the Holy Spirit, Source of life and light, the Comforter whom the Father has sent to guide us into all truth, to convince of sin, and to renew and sanctify the heart,

*We dedicate this house.*

For worship in prayer and song, for the ministry of the word, for the celebration of the holy sacraments,

*We dedicate this house.*

For comfort to those who mourn; for strength to those who are tempted, for help in right living,

*We dedicate this house.*

For the sanctification of the family, for the guidance of childhood, for the salvation of men,

*We dedicate this house.*

For the fostering of patriotism, for the training of conscience, for aggression against evil,

*We dedicate this house.*

For the help of the needy, for the promotion of brotherhood, for bringing in the Kingdom of God,

*We dedicate this house.*

As a tribute of gratitude and love, a free-will offering of thanksgiving and praise, from those who have tasted the cup of Thy salvation, and experienced the riches of Thy grace,

*We, the people of this Church and Congregation, now consecrating ourselves anew, dedicate this entire building in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*  
*AMEN.*

GLORIA PATRI.

CONGREGATION

QUARTET.—“Still, still with Thee” . . . . . *Gerrish*

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION.

THE PASTOR

QUARTET.—“Awake, my soul, to joyful lays” . . . . . *Schnecker*

PRAYER AND BENEDICTION.

THE REV. A. M. RICE

POSTLUDE. . . . . *Selected*

MRS. ARTHUR P. PLIMPTON

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THE WESLEY QUARTET OF SPRINGFIELD

Miss Josephine E. Floyd, *Soprano*

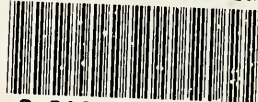
Miss Josephine E. Floyd, *Soprano*      Mr. J. H. Bailey, *Tenor*

Mrs. William Ritter, *Contralto*      Mr. C. D. Monroe, *Basso*

Miss Viola G. Packard, *Organist*



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